TWICE-A-MONTH

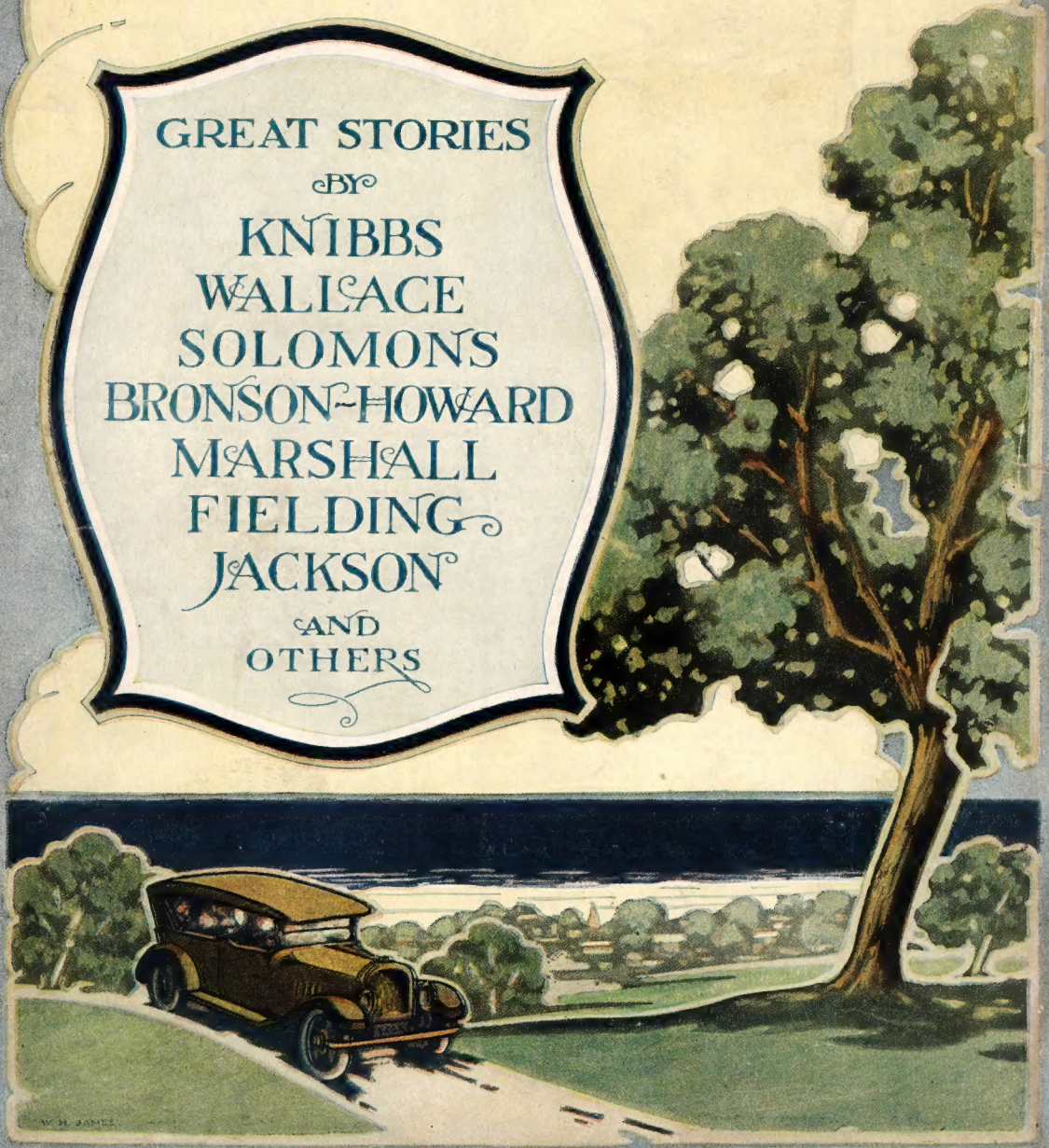
The Popular Magazine

VOL. 53
NO. 6

20
CENTS

SEPTEMBER SEVENTH 1919

GREAT STORIES
BY
KNIBBS
WALLACE
SOLOMONS
BRONSON-HOWARD
MARSHALL
FIELDING
JACKSON
AND
OTHERS



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Roy Norton returns in the next number with a complete novel, "The Glyphs," and there is a new serial, "Fate and the Fighter," by **Dane Coolidge**

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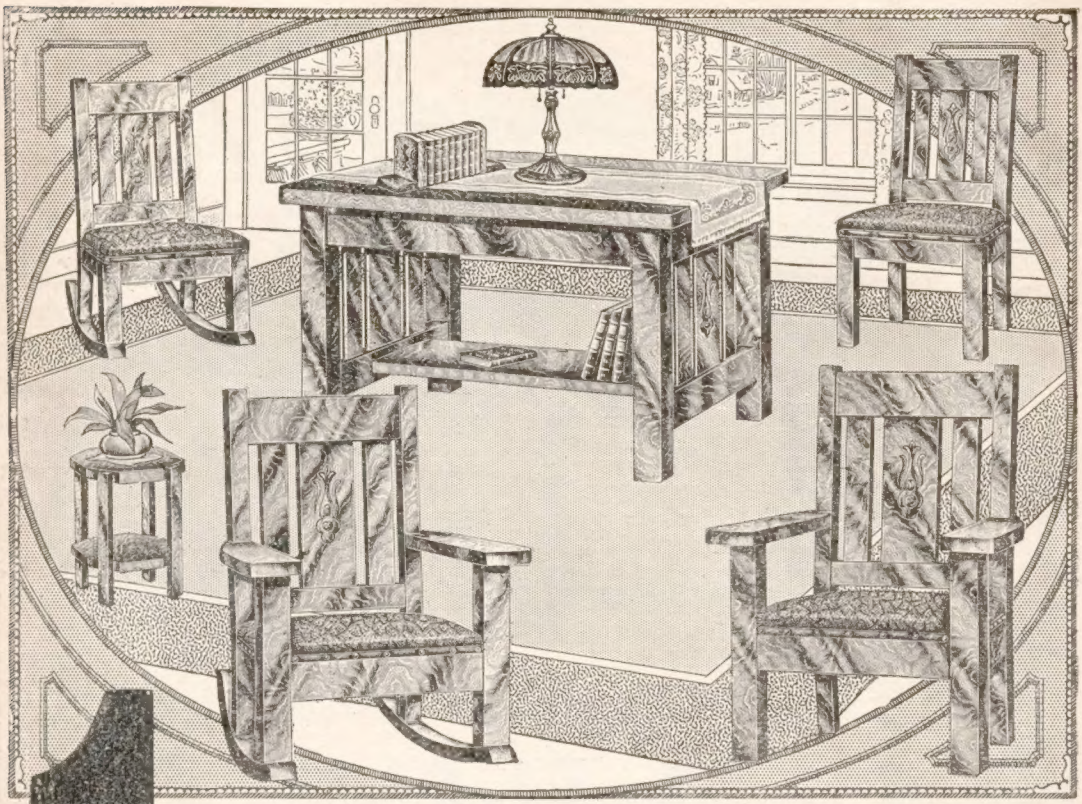

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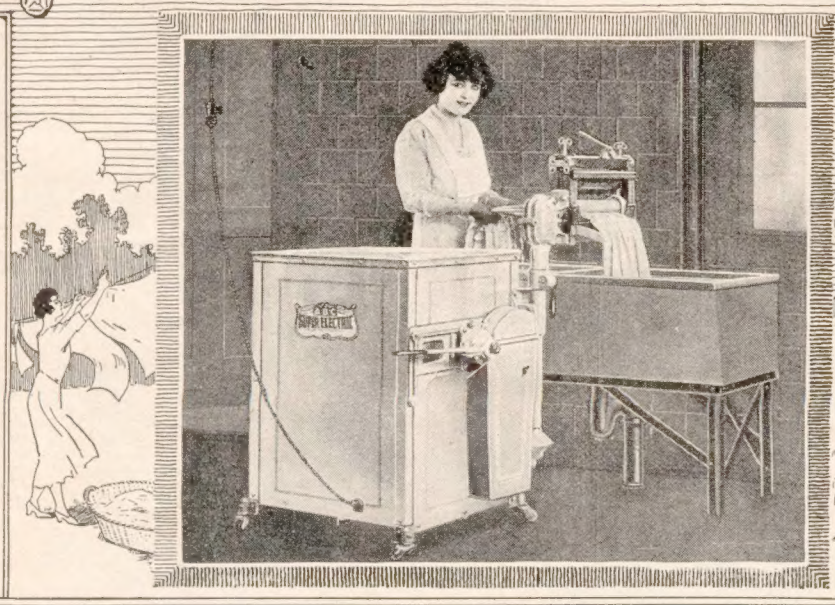

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LIII SEPTEMBER 7, 1919. No. 6.

Garments of Failure

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "On' Hate and Water," Etc.

We think our readers will find this story one of the most human and appealing pieces of fiction that they have read in a long time. It has to do with so much of the common lot—the daily drudgery and the infinite longing beyond it that all of us know—that Branchfield's experience becomes our own. And our sympathy with him in his struggle is almost personal. It takes courage of the highest order to break away from wife and children and a pleasant environment just to prove your intrinsic worth to yourself and those you love the best. From all this it is easy to gather that the novel is as original and stimulating as its title.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

BIG-HEARTED BILL.

MRS. JANE Mc—looks like McDonald. Mrs. Jane McDonald, twenty-three-eleven Oak Avenue, City. Dear Madam: Acknowledging receipt of your letter of the twenty-third instant, we greatly regret that we—cannot extend to you the credit you ask. We—eh—trust, however, that we may continue to enjoy your valued patronage, which we assure you we greatly appreciate——

"Why—why, what's the matter, Miss Beck?"

The assistant manager of the credit department gasped his astonishment at the behavior of his skimpy little stenographer. He had not seen her lip quiver as he dictated this formal rejection, for his attention had been fixed glumly on the appealing letter before him. But when he heard the girl drop her pencil and sob he turned and looked at her in consternation.

"She's my aunt; we live together; and she's been sick; and—we *do* need some things. And I hoped maybe——"

"Sh-sh," warned Branchfield confidentially, casting a furtive eye across the office at the manager who, fortunately, was at this moment launched on one of his expansive disquisitions. "Stick around a few minutes after closing time and tell me all about it. It's almost six now."

He took up the letter again, cleared his throat, and determinedly finished the dictation in his most formal manner.

A little later, on his way to the general manager's office to submit his weekly past-due list, he stopped in an angle of the corridor, searched his pockets, and frowned. Suddenly he remembered it was Saturday and pay day, and his usual smile came back.

The stroke of the gong found Branchfield slowly clearing his desk, and his ænemic young typist very deliberately washing her hands, dabbing at her hair, and adjusting her hat. The other clerks succeeded in getting away in an incredibly short time.

It took all of Branchfield's persuasiveness to get the girl to speak again of her needs. She seemed worried and ashamed, so he did not press her for details. He was content to gain her reluctant consent to wait for him near the pay window, where Graham, the cashier, dispensed the sealed salaries.

It was a typical afternoon for William Branchfield—perhaps a little worse than usual, though he had never called them bad days. He remembered that Saturday three years and two days afterward, on the great day of his life, the day of stunning illumination and of dreadful reckoning.

As he turned away from the window, he noticed that the boy who had preceded him was staring blankly at the contents of his pay envelope.

"What's the matter, sonny?" he asked. "Did the cashier make a mistake?"

"N-no," said the boy, "it's a week's pay all right. It's this here." He sniveled, and held up a blue slip.

Bill read it gravely, though he knew its contents quite well:

> Owing to increasing expenses, necessitating general retrenchments, the Centerville Mammoth Store is reluctantly obliged to dispense with your highly valued services.

"I'm fired, I guess," said the boy bewilderedly. He seemed a little stupefied by the shock of it.

"Well, well," said the big man regretfully, his hand on the lad's shoulder. Then he added briskly: "I was fired once, myself. It's nothing. Get another job. I know it's hard these days, but you can do it." He was covertly opening his own envelope.

"This'll kind of tide you over, I expect."

The boy wriggled away from Branchfield's offering hand; but before he turned and walked away the hand managed to drop a small gold coin into the youngster's pocket. In his haste to get away to hide his feelings the boy forgot to thank the big man, who, however, did not seem to mind.

Branchfield dodged through the throng of hurrying employes of the big department store to the aisle where the frail little stenographer awaited him. There were a few words, a moment's fumbling of hands—and Branchfield's envelope was lighter.

On the sidewalk he paused for a moment to chat with his chief, Mr. Fenwell Henderson, the manager of the credit department. It was a lucky encounter for his boss, who suddenly remembered something. Looking hurriedly at the revolving door, still tossing out employees, he said in a most casual way:

"Graham's closed by now, of course. Say, Bill, I forgot to draw an extra ten for my trip to-morrow. Can you let me have it?"

"Sure," said Branchfield, and Henderson pocketed the "ten," thanked his assistant offhandedly, and sauntered away.

Branchfield walked briskly down Washington Street, in the opposite direction. He was a tall, well-made man of nearly thirty, a little inclined to a comfortable stoutness. He radiated good humor and good will from his smiling gray eyes. At every few paces he received and gave back a nod and a smile, answering the salutation of, "Hello, Branchfield," or, more often, "Hello, Bill," with a pleasantly intimate word. For Centerville, though a city large enough for a full-fledged department store, still retained enough of the character of a town for many of its Saturday throng to know one another.

It was not far to the Bank Corner, as it was called, where Centerville's four most prosperous financial institutions faced each other across streets clanging with late-afternoon traffic. In front of the First National Branchfield paused to wait for the appearance of his most intimate friend, Tom Stickton, the bank's second bookkeeper. Three newsboys attacked him at once.

The most alert one reached him a shade ahead of the others and sold him a two-cent paper, for which, as usual, he gave the boy a nickel.

"Aw, say!" exploded the other two disappointedly.

"That's all right," said Branchfield, in a very businesslike way. "Let's have one now for our friend the bookkeeper." Whereat newsy number two fairly shot his paper into Bill's stomach.

"And—let me see." His eyes were on discouraged number three, a little fellow. "I guess we'll have to have one for friend wife, also."

A hand was clapped on his shoulder.

"At your old tricks, hey—Big-hearted Bill?"

It was Tom Stickton who said it, but the sobriquet had not originated with him. It was a schoolmaster of both of them who had applied a phrase that had continued to fit Branchfield as perfectly as his skin.

"Have one," said Bill, thrusting the lurid sheet into Tom's hands. "The usual crop of suicides and murders, and, for good measure, a brand-new gold strike in the Far North." They started off together.

"And what's the personal news, Tinkering Tom? How is The Old Man of the Sea?"

Stickton was a clean, slim, homely fellow, a little seedy looking, a little preoccupied. His slight stoop was that of the chronic bender, but it was The Old Man of the Sea as well as the ledgers of the bank that drew his shoulders.

His brow clouded as he replied: "Bills, bills, always bills. Bills for the Will-o'-the-Wisp. Guess I'll have to rename him Bill-o'-the-Wisp."

He threw this wry witticism over his shoulder at Branchfield, who had fallen a pace or two behind to seize a market basket from an old-fashioned, fat old lady who, like themselves, was hurrying to the trolley car. The big fellow gave her a heave onto the platform, returned her the basket, and resumed his conversation with his friend.

They left the car at Poplar Street and swung along its well-shaded walk for several blocks to the gate of Bill's home, where they parted with a cheery "Good night." That gate, to Tom Stickton, was a gate of gold.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOME OF THE SALARIED MAN.

That gate opened upon a narrow cement walk that divided a small lawn edged with a strip of garden. The little house, also surrounded with flowers, was like a pretty head with a very ornamental collar. Every day for three years when Branchfield opened this gate he paused a moment to admire his little home—his, bought and paid for, somehow. He had little else, but he did have this.

Little else, that is, of material possessions, but——

"Hullo, Will," greeted his wife, kissing him. And:

"'Lo, Bill," said three-year-old Elsie, sinking her chin to make her thin voice deep and chesty—at which her mother and father always laughed, and to which her father usually replied sepulchrally: "'Lo, Miss Branchfield. And how is my girl?"

"Fine and dandy," responded the child, vaulting up at Bill's chest with surprising agility. He carried her into the living room, where the dinner table stood, set and ready. When he deposited her upon the floor again she reached into his pockets and made a discovery.

"Oh, mamma, two papers, two!"

Mary Branchfield paused on her way to the kitchen.

"Why two papers?" she asked. Bill told her about the three newsboys.

"So you bought three evening papers from those little scamps."

That was all she said, but it made Bill wonder how she would take certain other little developments; and to have them over with he ate his dessert promptly, pushed his plate away, and spread out and counted his money. Mary eyed this proceeding with foreboding.

"It doesn't seem to be all here," said Bill uncomfortably. "Surely I didn't pay out—— Well, let's see." He set himself determinedly to the accounting. "I gave ten dollars to Miss Beck."

"The new stenographer? Is she pretty, Will?" asked Mary archly. Branchfield looked questioningly at the air a moment.

"I—think so. Really, I never noticed."

Mary smiled and looked a kiss. She knew there was no affectation in her husband's reply.

She listened quietly to his explanation of the loan, and said: "I see."

"Then I gave five to a boy that was discharged—by a blue slip. Rather brutal way, I call it. Economy—rising cost of wrapping paper, or some such evasion." Bill mumbled his excuses with a covert glance at his wife's tightening lips.

"But there's ten more gone, Will," she said.

"Oh, that's all right—just Henderson. He'd forgotten to draw enough money, and just remembered it on the sidewalk. He's good, of course."

"Has he paid those other little loans you made him?"

"He will, no doubt."

"Oh, no doubt," returned Mary sarcastically. "Some time—perhaps!" Her eyes blazed. "I think he's a cur, to borrow money from you in that shameless way. He gets nearly twice your salary and has no family."

Bill frowned and bit his lips, and Mary, fearing to say more, began energetically to clear the table. Bill, glad to be let off so easily, took the evening paper to his easy-chair and was soon deep in the Alaskan gold strike. But he was mistaken in supposing that he had been let off thus easily. For when the dishes were washed, and the

little kitchen put in apple-pie order, and her apron hung up, and little Elsie put to bed, Mary drew a chair close to her husband and waited.

Bill put down the paper and took her hand, sheepishly conscious now that one of their not-infrequent little pow-wows was on. And he rightly judged from his wife's manner that this was to be not such a little pow-wow, either.

"Will, dear," began Mary determinedly, "let us talk about our prospects."

"All right, little mother; what is it now?"

"Oh, it's nothing new, of course; just the same as always. Only—we simply *must* do something. We pay our bills—just about. But we never have a thing over. We've been lucky in having no doctor's bills, though I ought to have some dental work done, and there are—oh, other things that I'd like to do and like to have. But I won't go into debt."

"Well, my dear," soothed Branchfield, "I suppose I'll be due for a raise in the course of time. These big concerns are slow but sure, and——"

"Will!" exclaimed Mary reprovingly. "Will, don't evade. You know I'm not referring to your salary. Have you any idea how much less than your salary our household budget is? It *is* 'budget,' isn't it?"

She smiled at the official word. She felt she must inject some lightness into the manner of conducting this conversation, which was to be of serious import.

"Y-e-s," admitted her husband, "I suppose I do spend quite a bit on the outside. A man has to—in a way."

"*You* don't spend 'quite a bit'—at least not on yourself." She flew to his defense there. "You are not a self-indulgent man. I wouldn't care so much if you were—yes, I would, of course. You know what I mean. *We*, at least, would be spending it. But you are quite the reverse of self-indulgent. You walk, sometimes, to save car fare. Don't deny it, for I know you do. And you smoke very inexpensive cigars."

"How do you know that, little girl?" queried Bill, with amused skepticism.

Mary was embarrassed, but she admitted she had priced them at a cigar store—she knew the names from the bands he gave the baby for thumb rings.

"You little spy, you!" cried Branchfield, amazed.

"I wanted to be sure of my theory."

"Your theory!"

"Yes, my theory that you actually save on yourself to—— Will, what priced cigars does Henderson smoke?"

Branchfield did not reply at once. He did not like the drift of the conversation. But Mary was waiting.

"Oh—twelve and a half, fifteen, and twenty-five cents."

"Two and a half, three, and five times the price of yours. *I thought so.*"

"You'd make a good price clerk, Mary," said Bill, with a twinkle in his eye.

Mrs. Branchfield did not acknowledge this bantering compliment. Somehow, she was not getting anywhere. And she was determined she should. She looked him full in the face.

"Will, why do you give and give?" Her manner sobered him and he really considered her question.

"I like to, I suppose," he answered at length. "But I wouldn't do it just for that—I think I wouldn't. At least I hope I wouldn't. But we have more than many others. People are shiftless and improvident, poor devils. They're always in difficulties. And somehow, people's difficulties are so often of the sort that money smoothes away. Such a little money, often—just a few dollars. And it tickles them. They look *so* relieved!"

Mary's face darkened.

"Yes, I know how they look. And how they act—before and after. It's usually poison for them, that's what it is. Ruin—of body and mind and spirit. It's just damnation!"

Branchfield stared at his brown-eyed little wife. He could not remember when she had spoken so intensely, so bitterly. It was almost a new Mary.

"You're wrong, my dear," he said vehemently. "We cannot live to ourselves. Men are brothers, Mary. Mankind is a brotherhood. We used to be agreed about that—long before we were married, even."

Mrs. Branchfield rose. She was a hard-working little woman, and one gifted rather with silence than with speech. Argument was not natural to her—nor to her husband, either. But she made a last attempt, speaking quietly, but with an earnestness which he was long to remember and to misconstrue.

"It wouldn't be so bad if you gave the little that we *could* give more carefully—

on some plan, and to the really deserving, the really appreciative. But you give—oh, just impulsively. Fancy, charity to Henderson; brotherhood to Henderson. Will, we may have more children, and——"

"Sufficient unto the day is the blessing thereof," interjected the father of only one.

"And these haphazard, ill-considered benefactions spell pain and failure for us, as sure as we live. They will keep you a clerk, me a drudge, our children—who knows?" Mary's eyes felt coming moisture. Hastily she turned and fled upstairs, and bent long over the crib of sleeping Elsie, thinking the thought of every healthy young wife when she looks at her child that has neither brother nor sister.

Branchfield sat for a long time, sometimes thinking, sometimes daydreaming. And into his daydreams flitted the picture of the distressed girl, of the distressed boy, and of the joy of the newsies—and pictures of the host of such as these that had gone before.

And as he folded up the paper before going to bed the headlines of the Alaskan gold strike stared up at him again from the front page.

CHAPTER III.

A SWIFT DECISION.

It happened, naturally enough, that the Centerville *Herald's* Sunday paper was full of this latest and greatest discovery of gold. There were four columns of news and three pages of supplement features, including a picture of the docking of the steamer, with returned Argonauts, bearded and gaunt, crowding the rails. There was a reproduction of a large nugget from Midas Creek, said to be a coming rival of the famed El Dorado Creek of Klondike fame, and a graphic halftone of the determined-looking miner who uncovered it.

Scores of interviews with the home-coming miners followed—miners who were home only to "get an outfit," or "form a company," or, at the least, to "see the folks," before returning North.

But what most enthralled Branchfield, rendering him oblivious even to the playful overtures of Miss Elsie, were the opinions and advice of leading citizens of Seattle, Spokane, and even Centerville, in regard to the opportunities offered the toiler of the city or town. Many young business men in subordinate positions, tired of slow promotions, were starting for Alaska. After a night of deep and troubled cogitation, that seemed to him to be the spirit of much that was said.

The stampede was expected to gain momentum slowly, and the first to reach the region would have the best chance. They would be "in on the ground floor." A boat was advertised to start in four days.

Mary noticed his preoccupation and guessed its cause; for in her passing to and from the living room she glanced at the headlines and the pictures in the pages strewn about the lounge and easy-chair. But she hesitated to question him. She was a little contrite over her recent outburst of feeling, and she preferred waiting for him to speak.

But it was not till their dinner was half over that Branchfield looked up from the writing pad he had taken to the table with him and told her what he thought he ought to do. There was a constraint between them, engendered by her unusually frank expressions of the night before, though the subject itself was an old one. But he had his case well in hand, and he put it with the simplicity that was natural to him.

"Mary," he began, "there is much truth in what you said last night. So much that—well, you know it's the truth that hurts. I give too much for our good—or for your good and the child's, at least."

Mary winced at this.

"I suppose it's just *in* me to—to think so much of my friends and acquaintances. But what makes it worse is the infernal job I've got. I'm turning them down, Mary, all day long—the needy ones, and the improvident ones, that ask for credit. Oh, yes, I know they're improvident! And the other half of my time I'm dunning more needy and improvident ones—using all my ingenuity to wring money from them. It's a cold, hard game. And out of office hours it's sort of——" He took in his breath like one going into the outer air from a noisome dungeon. "It sort of puts me square with myself to be free and impulsive, as you called it, and—human. And it doesn't do. I know it; I know it, Mary. And I know, too, or at least I fear, it's incurable. A change of job might help, but I'd have to take a smaller salary and sacrifice much that has been gained with difficulty."

"If you could only discriminate—just discriminate, Will."

"I can't. It isn't in me. I can't investigate and weigh and judge and approve and condemn my fellows. It seems to be part of my principles to shut my eyes and just relieve—just as it comes, just haphazard, as you said. Yet I want to satisfy you. Your ambitions are natural enough."

Mary, in dumb misery at his obtuseness, shut her eyes in wordless pain. Whereat he tried to mend things:

"Your ambitions for all of us. It's right, Mary. At least, it's natural—and usual, I dare say. And perhaps there's a way out. Perhaps this is just a coincidence" His eyes drew hers to the Sunday supplement. "Or perhaps it's more—a kind of providence. But here is this gold strike, and I'm strong and young yet."

He had meant to go on and tell her all the details, but somehow he found that at present there was nothing more to tell. The silence lengthened. With downcast eyes she served the dessert. Even little Elsie ceased her prattle to fuzzy Fido.

"Let me think, Will." That was all she finally said.

Bill helped her gather up the dishes and take them through the swinging door, and then he returned and played with the child and the dog till Mary should finish thinking as she finished her dishes. But she did not finish her dishes. She scarcely began them, and there was little sound in the kitchen till he heard Mary's footfall, and she stood before him.

"How can you equip yourself and pay the fare, Will? And how could Elsie and I live?"

The hard part had come.

"We should have to mortgage the house, I suppose. No doubt we could raise more than enough."

He expected her to cry out, aghast. He did not know that Mary, with a worldly wisdom which he was not fully to appreciate for years, had sensed this hours before he spoke.

"It would be speculation with all that we now have, wouldn't it, Will? A kind of pure gamble?"

The optimist in him, the rosy dreamer, cried a muffled "no." But the honest sense of the man stifled it.

"The chances ought to be tip-top, Mary. There are many business opportunities of a sort, up there, besides gold mining, but —yes, I suppose it's a speculation."

"And you wish very much to go, Will?"

"Well, yes," he replied, "for I certainly believe it is the solution of our problem."

She stepped to him thoughtfully and touched his forehead in exactly the same way she touched the child's when she suspected a little fever. It was *her* problem that he meant, for she knew that to him there was no problem in their present life. Yes, it was her problem, much though he misunderstood it, that he wished to solve.

"Big-hearted Bill," she said with a far-away look, as though remembering some written line of beauty. Then day came back to her eyes and she added cheerfully:

"Well, if you can raise the money, which I rather doubt—why, go ahead, Will, and Elsie and I will get along somehow."

His impulse was to recant, his instincts being, for the moment, at war. But, manlike—and who shall say it is unwise—he groped back to what to him was the surer ground of his deliberated judgment. The die was cast. He rose, relieved, kissed her, and said with energy:

"Well, now to get some financial advice from Tinkering Tom."

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD MAN OF THE SEA.

William J. Branchfield was decidedly a good-looking man, both in face and figure. He looked particularly well that Sunday afternoon as he walked down Poplar Street, swinging a light stick, dressed, as always, with an unstudied taste and elegance of which he was little conscious. To look as well, most men needed to give thought to their grooming.

He was perhaps quite as unconscious of the fact that he owed a great deal of his decided social success to this personableness—a blending of his open, agreeable, quietly sympathetic manner with his likable and satisfying appearance. This fact, whose importance, unjustified by the greater values of life, is indubitable in the world of little men, he was to learn upon his day of reckoning.

Walking briskly through a prettily shaded little park, effervescent with flowering life, it was easy for his ebullient nature to throw off the dampening effects of his conversation with Mary. Whistling, he

let his thoughts wing through his plans to their golden goal in Alaska—and back to Centerville. In this exultant mood he issued from the park, crossed the street, and entered the grounds surrounding one of Centerville's earliest mansions.

The trees were older there, and of a rarer kind; exotic flowers, long acclimated, bloomed contentedly among the commoner kinds. The lawns were clipped, but otherwise unkept; and the walks, partly of brick, partly of artificial stone laid in the 'prentice days of the craft, were cracked and somewhat weed-grown. The whole appearance of the grounds, as well as of the handsome house itself, suggested a prosperity that had long waned.

There was a bygone touch of sadness in the sunny, smiling beauty of the old place. But Branchfield, familiar with it from boyhood, went whistling up the wide walk to the broad, warped steps, and rang the antique wire bell-pull at the side of dark-paneled double doors. A little, old, rheumatic woman in starched gingham opened it and smiled rosily at Bill Branchfield, as all old people did.

"Come in, Mr. Branchfield. Mr. Tom is——"

"In the Cave, of course."

"Of course," she agreed, and led him across the hall floor, inlaid with an arabesque of hard woods, into the big living room—the first in Centerville, it had been, to depart from that time-honored arrangement of all "nice" houses—the front and back parlors with sliding doors between. Bill appropriated an old leather easy-chair, while the housekeeper limped off to summon Stickton from the Cave.

Years ago, before Centerville's later rich built and filled more costly homes, this room had had a great vogue among art lovers of the town. Its furnishings, then of the finest, were even to-day, to the discerning, possessed of a value and beauty which every passing year enhanced. And many and varied objects of art, on tables and walls and carven shelves, shared this enrichment of time. Whatever might be true of the rest of the house, this room, at least, was sure to be well kept and cared for. No less than this could plodding Tom do for the memories of his father and mother.

"Hullo, Bill," said the owner of the place, suddenly appearing in the doorway. "What means this thusness? I thought Sunday calls had gone out of style."

"You bet they have with me, you old Silurian. But this is something special. However, just to be polite, how is The Old Man of the Sea this lovely p. m.?"

"The Will o' the Wisp?" parried Tom. It was an old game they played with these names, each mirroring his view of the creature concerned. "Well, as I told you last night, he's getting darned expensive again."

"Again!" echoed Branchfield.

"Again and yet—especially again. Come into the Cave and I'll show you." He led the way to a little room in the rear of the house which was fitted up as a workshop. A bulky thing—half typewriter, half printing press—with a capacious maw in which lay an open ledger, stood enthroned on a low table.

"Just to get the balky brute to pick those pages automatically, instead of merely turning them when the right account is found for him, takes an entirely new set of reciprocators. But that wouldn't be so bad if those Detroit people didn't insist that the whole bunch of connecting rods have to be replaced at the same time."

"What's the difference?" asked Bill.

"Two hundred and seventy-five dollars instead of one hundred. That's all!" There was worry and weariness in Tom's voice.

"Can't you get the First National to help you?"

"Chisholm? Just imagine!"

"Talking of Chisholm, Tom, reminds me of my matter. Don't drop dead, now, but—I'm going to chuck my job and go to Alaska!"

"What the—— No!"

"Yep."

"And Mary and the little sprite?" Tom looked his amazement. In his heart he could not, indeed, imagine this.

"I'll have to provide for them some way, of course. You see, it's like this." And he told his friend very frankly, as was his wont with this old schoolfellow, of his talk with his wife, and of how things had been going with them for a very long time—of the slow progress of the salaried man, which Tom was but too well aware of! Of her dissatisfaction, seldom expressed in words, it was true, but keenly felt by him none the less; of his own feeling of dissatisfaction over hers, yet his wish to please and satisfy her.

"You know," he added, "there's a touch of downright worldliness in Mary; a good thing, perhaps, in its way, in a woman with a family, and the future to look after—all that sort of thing. But worldliness, just the same."

"Worldliness," repeated Tom ruminatively, as if searching his memory for a picture of such a trait. He frowned a little and shook his head. "Hardly—in Mary," he said, half to himself.

Bill's smile was the smile of the married person's superiority of knowledge of his spouse. It implied that by comparison with that knowledge the estimate even of the lifelong friend must necessarily be shallow.

"At all events," resumed Branchfield, the preliminaries now over, "the decision has been definitely made, and I want you to advise me in regard to a loan. I'll want about two thousand dollars. Wouldn't the First National take the house and lot as security?"

Stickton was a serious fellow with a long neck, a snub nose, rather pale eyes, and sandy hair that was—just hair! Except upon the subject of his invention, he was receptive rather than assertive. His homely visage perceptibly contracted when Branchfield spoke of mortgaging his house. But he only replied:

"The First National doesn't loan on residence property, and I doubt whether any of the banks are doing it under present financial conditions. But Fiske & Co., over our bank, will undoubtedly loan. Come down to-morrow and I'll introduce you to Ephraim Fiske."

"All right, old man, that'll be fine. And at the same time, why don't *you* get a loan, Tom, on the place here. You could fit out The Old Man of the Sea till he looked like a sure-enough bookkeeping contraption. This way—relying on what you can spare from your salary—he'll be riding you for the next ten years."

They had walked out of the Cave and entered the living room again—the darkly beautiful old salon that had been the pride of his elegant, leisurely Southern father.

"The house itself has been mortgaged since before father's death," replied Tom. "I thought you knew it. As to the contents of the house"—and he glanced lovingly down the long room. "No, I'm afraid to," he finished simply.

Branchfield, lingering a few moments, the quiet of the house, the silence between them, stirred a certain thought.

"Why don't you marry, Tom? The old house is forlorn. It needs the laughter of kids." He turned toward the corridor.

Tom slapped him on the back with an affected air of cheerfulness and resignation.

"Not for me, Bill. You won!"

CHAPTER V.

THE MORTGAGE.

A little afraid that his determination might ooze away if his preparations flagged, Branchfield allowed no grass to grow under the feet of the Alaska project. He went directly from the Stickton residence to the public library, where he made copious notes upon the country he was going to, the routes of travel, the outfits recommended to the prospector. Then he returned home and worked on his notes far into the night.

At the opening hour of the Mammoth Store, he handed in a written resignation at the main office, told Fenwell Henderson what he had done, and asked him if the resignation could not take effect at once, since he had only three days in which to wind up his affairs, prepare his equipment, and catch the next steamer at Seattle.

"Oh, I suppose so, Bill," answered Henderson rather grudgingly. He offered a further and unsolicited favor—he would give Bill an older man's advice.

"Are you sure you want to throw up everything for this gold-mining idea? You know they usually drift back worse than broke. You have a good job here, and the management, as the result of my reports, have occasionally spoken well of you. It *is* slow, as you say, but it's tolerably sure."

Bill thanked him feelingly for his counsel. It was a fine thing to know that his friends had his interests at heart. He should never forget that. But no, he had quite made up his mind. Youth was slipping away and he must bestir himself.

By appointment he met Mary at the bank when it opened. Tom came out of his cage and greeted them. For several years the association of the two men had been an out-of-doors—a fishing and hunting—comradeship, so that despite their intimacy, Tom did not see Mary Branchfield often. But their greeting was always a cordial one.

"Well, I've seen Fiske and described the property," said Tom. "He demurred a little at two thousand dollars, but that's just his habit. It's all right; come on."

Banking and loans were a little out of Branchfield's line. He nodded his satisfaction at Tom's words, and the three walked out of the portal of the bank to the sidewalk and into the entrance way of the offices above. It was by no means the first time during that period of stringency that a residence owner had turned from the bank downstairs to "Fiske & Co., Loans and Investments," upstairs.

Ephraim Fiske, a plainly dressed, middle-aged man who possessed, among certain less obvious gifts, a singularly pertinacious way of questioning a client, sat at a large, old-fashioned desk. There were a clerk and a typist in the office, which was well filled with law books, commercial reports, voluminous real-estate records and maps, a large and a small safe of ancient construction, and various accumulated appurtenances of office thrift.

Fiske was as exact as the average lawyer and much more punctual. While he chatted animatedly with his "three young friends," drawing from them considerably more than he imparted, his typist finished the mortgage and handed it to him, complete except for dates and amounts. It was "of the usual form," Fiske averred; and from the fact that the body of it was printed, Branchfield and Stickton assumed that it was of the usual form. It was, in fact, a sort of mortgage as common as it is vicious—in its form an absolute deed, which required no foreclosure to dispossess the delinquent borrower of his home.

Branchfield had suggested a year as the term of the loan, but Mary and Tom thought that two years would be safer. Fiske agreed to this, and made the mortgage come due two years from its date—July 3d.

A check drawn on the First National was handed Branchfield, and the money lender shook hands with his clients, and wished the adventurer every success. The trio then returned to the bank, where Stickton introduced the Branchfields to the president and manager, who greeted them with a dignified cordiality.

"I've heard my father speak of you years ago, Mr. Chisholm," said Bill.

"As well he might," returned Chisholm, who was one of Centerville's oldest and solidest citizens. "In former years we were thrown together a great deal in many civic enterprises for the good of this thriving city. It is odd that we have never met—er—William; but Centerville has grown so fast!"

The oddity of their never having met was, of course, mere subtle flattery, seeing that Branchfield was little more than a clerk. But Chisholm's manner betrayed no slightest hint of this.

During this pleasant conversation, Stickton was having prepared a passbook for Mary Branchfield. A thousand dollars was placed to her credit, and the other thousand paid to Bill in currency and Alaska drafts. Then Chisholm, with great affability, conducted Mary to the bank's signature book and introduced her to the cashier, who gave her several bright, crisp check books.

Branchfield took advantage of the latter formalities to draw Tom aside and press three hundred dollars upon him.

"Why, what's this for, Bill?" inquired Stickton.

"For the reciprocators of The Old Man of the Sea."

Stickton's pale eyes warmed a little, as he fingered the yellow-backs. But he held them out again to Branchfield.

"That's absurd, Bill; it'll run you short."

"Not a cent," replied the other heartily. "I simply added that sum to the total of my needs and Mary's, and the grand total was two thousand dollars. So, you see, I merely borrowed a little for you while the borrowing was good. That'll keep The Old Man of the Sea off your back for a time, anyhow."

"It was mighty thoughtful of you, old pal," declared Tom, with little attempt to hide his satisfaction. "I confess I was pretty near to despair, and I suppose you read it."

"Your feelings over your—eh, Will-o'-the-Wisp are tolerably plain, as a rule," admitted his friend.

"But what about repaying it?"

"Say nothing about it now. But you'll have plenty of time to repay it to Mary before I return. And I know you'll doubly repay it in keeping a weather eye on the family."

"I sure will," promised Stickton fervently. And they rejoined the others.

Manager Chisholm's leave-taking of the

Branchfields was not unlike that of Ephraim Fiske. It was even more cordial and was particularly polished. Among several ornate expressions of interest and good-will toward Branchfield in his "hazardous venture," he sandwiched the delicate suggestion that should—eh, William require any conveniences in the way of exchange, the sale of gold dust, or other financial agency, the First National possessed exceptional facilities, et cetera, et cetera. And he assured "William," as he held his hand, that, whether he were lucky or unlucky, his friends would "welcome him back to his home town."

It was the kind of thing that was life itself to Bill Branchfield.

CHAPTER VI.

LEAVE-TAKINGS.

Two strenuous days followed—days of rush and hurry for Branchfield, and of steady, systematic help from his wife, who listed his supplies and did his packing with consummate care and skill.

There were numerous recruits from Centerville to the little army of gold seekers. Some of them were from humble walks of life. Others were, like Branchfield, from the business world. All were the objects, among friends and acquaintances, of an intense, though transient, interest, centering, it must be admitted, as much in the hotly debated question whether they were "poor simps" or "wise ones" as in the fortunes of the argonauts. Branchfield, being in his sphere by far the best known of the stampeders, was continually stopped on the street and interrogated as to how he came to think of going, and all the whys and wherefores. But whatever the place, or the length, or the character, of each hurried chat, it ended in but one way—the vigorous handclasp, good luck, and they'd be glad to see him back.

His good-bys at the Mammoth Store, which were the last and, naturally, the most numerous, were particularly pleasing to Bill, who remembered them to the last detail. The youngsters grinned and envied him. The older ones were more wary. Henderson cloaked his cynicism with easy grace and shook Bill's hand with an affluent condescension which simulated cordiality. Having had a three-days' experience with Branchfield's none-too-competent successor, he was inspired to say that, win or lose, the Mammoth Store in general and the credit department in particular would welcome him back "in a personal quite as much as in a business way." He even accompanied his late assistant a few feet along the glass-lined corridor and gave him a parting slap on the back.

There was moisture in Branchfield's eyes as he walked rapidly away.

On his way out of the store, he took a cordial leave of Graham, the cashier, who, five years before, had entered the employ of the Mammoth Store during the same month that Branchfield came.

"No more pay envelopes, hey, Bill? Yours in chunks from now on, what?" prophesied Graham genially. And as Bill got away he threw at him:

"So long, old man, and welcome home by-and-by."

Quite a little throng, numbering acquaintances equally with friends, were at the train to see Bill off. Mary and Elsie stood quietly on the platform, while Bill shook hands all round till his arm, which had begun to hurt yesterday, was quite lame.

As the train moved off he turned to Stickton, who stood near. But instead of the handclasp he expected, Tom merely swung aboard and said that he'd taken the day off to see Bill started on his voyage. Bill and Mary scolded him for this waste of time, at which he merely shrugged his lean shoulders.

It was a journey of some hours by rail and street car to the steamer's side. And from the starting of the train to the second officer's deep and ominous "All aboard!" an eerie sense of unreality dwelt with Branchfield and his wife. It was a dream decision, surely, that they were carrying out; for how could anything so momentous have been shaped out of four short days? Though every factor, every detail, leading up to their being where they were, moving swiftly to an Alaska steamer, was clear and sequential in their minds, it all was flavored with the fictitious—it was incredible! But the parting that impended was a very real thing and, being Anglo-Saxon folk, it set them almost reticent. Yet what few words and acts there were between them seemed freighted, beyond their common meaning, with regard and blessing.

Stickton, tactful, after his kind, directed their movements to the long wooden pier,

peopled with a bustling, excited crowd. He preceded them along its splintery way to the gangplank, stowed Bill's hand baggage in his stateroom, and generally left the Branchfields to themselves. Only at the end, when the time was up, the last assurances hurriedly whispered, and the sprite explosively kissed and put down again, did Stickton seize Bill's hand.

"You'll—you'll——" stammered Bill.

"I'll look out for them," finished Tom.

Branchfield sprang up the gangplank with the last motley group of northbound voyagers and sought the nearest vacant space along the rail. The other three moved along the wharf, weaving through the ranks that lined its edge, until they stood below him, and the conversation was resumed. Queerly ordinary things they said, now—in a strangely ordinary way.

Though her lines were cast off, the ship seemed in no haste to leave the pier. But suddenly Elsie pointed her finger at the great black plates of the hull and shrilled: "It's going; it's going!" And slowly—with an intensely dramatic slowness and silence—space began to develop between Bill and the precious beings below him. The space increased; green, shimmering water appeared between them; a last good-by was voiced quite loudly, and then Mary drew her handkerchief. She must have instructed the child, for instantly the little one drew hers, too, from a small pocket, and furiously waved it. Then, but not till them, Tom waved, and finally Bill himself, as if remembering something, got out a new, glazed blue bandanna from his hip pocket and flourished this miner's handkerchief with laughter at the oddity of it.

Away off, in an almost indistinguishable line of people on the pier, he saw a woman raise a child in her slender arms, and he knew that Mary had waved their little one as her final good-by!

The sense of unreality departed with the fading of the wharf. Abruptly, Branchfield was struck poignantly with a sense of what he had done, what he was doing. Never having trod the deck of a seagoing vessel, the utter strangeness of his surroundings was symbol enough of the disruption he had wrought of all that his former life had meant.

Under full headway now, the ungainly old craft, condemned to the Alaska run, glided up the Sound, whose forested shores were darkening in the shadow of the Olympians. Men in Mackinaws slouched about the decks, quieting dogs, lashing canvas-sewn packages into sleds, and quarreling with the ubiquitous Scandinavian mates.

He was of this, now. Because of a woman's discontent, quixotically stirring his own, he, the fastidious, urban dweller, devoted for years to ledgers, to the discreet innuendoes of Dun and Bradstreet, had severed the ties that bound him to that life and attached himself to this.

He was a fool—footloose, free; a new world awaiting him off there northward of that paling sunset. What was he going to do about it? He did not greatly value money, but those shrewd, practical good friends of his valued it for him. For their sakes—and Mary's—he must go through with it—dogs, Mackinaws, quarreling Swedes and all.

He bared his head to the only land he had ever known, took a deep breath of the cooling air of the inland waters, and vowed he'd win. Yes, he was a fool, but he would succeed. Soft of muscle, tender of hand, superbly ignorant of the life ahead—he *would* succeed!

He turned from the rail and went below.

CHAPTER VII.

AN "ALASKA WIDOW."

Whether Mary Branchfield was worldly or not, she was certainly thrifty. She did not rely altogether upon her thousand dollars, but turned her hand to the readiest earning which would permit her to remain at home with her little daughter: she sewed. If she was worldly, at least she seemed free from worldly pride—or subdued it with celerity.

But she had another reason for her thrift, which she might have told her husband before he left; though on that Saturday night when she urged upon him the necessity of saving, she herself had only vaguely suspected it. After he began to prepare for his journey suspicion became probability, and it was then that the urge to tell him became strong within her. Yet not so strong, seemingly, as a something which held her back. And the springs of this withholding—whether pure waters of courage and devotion or the turbid impulse to let the man go upon his perilous quest for wealth for them—Branchfield was after-

ward to debate, while staring into many a glowing log.

On nights as many and as lonely, before extinguishing her bedroom light, his wife stood, a white figure of musing motherhood, and saw in her mind's eye a little basket take shape beside the crib of her sleeping child.

She was a practical woman; and since Will might return, or might send her money long before she needed it, she only filled her leisure time with her needlework, and her little house and her little girl were quite as well taken care of as before. With the first money she earned, she had made and framed an enlargement of a photograph of Elsie's father, and hung it on the wall, opposite the child's bed. It could hardly be considered a worldly picture, for it showed Branchfield in his shirt sleeves in the back garden. He had thrown aside his hoe and stood with open arms braced against the coming shock of one of energetic Elsie's vaults.

Stickton called regularly, usually as he passed the house at the end of his day's work. His inquiries and the replies were much the same on each occasion. They became, in fact, so standardized, as one might say, that little Elsie delighted to enact the part of both Tom and Mary.

"Been a little warm to-day, Mary," she would say to Tom, and, after a suitable pause: "Oh, it's been lovely, Tom." "And how've you been?" "Oh, fine and dandy." "And little sprite?" "Lively as a cricket." "Anything I can do for you?" "Nothing, thank you; we're all right."

The appearance of mamma upon the scene sometimes interrupted this dialogue in monologue. Sometimes it supplemented it. But later on Tom ceased to call, and it was at Mary Branchfield's request.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TENDERFOOT.

Borealis City, after the days of Branchfield's early struggles, became, if not exactly a city, at least a substantial and respectable little town. But when Bill reached it on the little Yukon steamer to which he had transshipped after a hazardous scow run down the lakes and rapids, the title was extravagant rather than appropriate.

It was a sprawling, straggling place of tents, shacks, log cabins, and not a few frame buildings. On the opposite side of Moosehide River, the confluent stream on which it was built, its small but spunky competitor, Aurora City, boasted the advantage of being "nearer the creeks." It *was* nearer—by three hundred yards, or about one four-hundred-and-ninetieth of the entire distance!

Main Street of Borealis City was probably as interesting a thoroughfare to the eye of the connoisseur of the novel and extraordinary in human society as could be found anywhere on the face of the earth. But Bill Branchfield gave it only a delighted, horrified, bewildered "once over," and then, with pick, pan, and pack, joined a group from the steamer and headed for the creeks. He had been fifty-three days getting into Borealis, the summer was on the wane, and he felt he had no time to lose. At Aurora City he had made a rude camp and cache for his outfit, filled his pack sack with as much as he thought he could handle, and early in the morning was toiling up the soggy trails with the rest, his rubber boots clumsily squdging in the deep, miry mosses.

On his long journey into the country, he had flattered himself on having gone through a hardening process and learned much. He was now to discover his mistake and to realize that his trip into the interior of Alaska had been hardly a foretaste of the grueling life of the prospector of the Far North who really means business.

He had brought to the undertaking no elements of fitness except youth, health, and size. But these were negative advantages until they could be utilized. And to utilize them there was needed a strenuous development impossible without qualities of character the most sterling and indomitable.

He was first to make the intimate acquaintance of discomfort and fatigue. Until by painful degrees he might gain the skill to banish them, these two ogres were to companion him day and night. He was to drink yellow water, frequently warm. He was to bend his weary back over the unfamiliar processes of camp cookery. He was to eat this product—stale and unpalatable enough if well prepared; for he was of the larger army of strugglers for wealth whose last savings or borrowings had gone for "an outfit" pared down to the barest necessities; and he found that the old saying that a keen appetite gives relish to the

plainest food does not apply to those who are utterly fagged.

He was to learn that merely to go from place to place meant the ceaseless dragging or lugging of that "outfit" over earth surface that he found decidedly ill-adapted to the human foot. It was wet, always—save when the cracking cold of winter dried all surface moisture into ice; and he himself was never wholly dry. And he was to learn the meaning of *plague*—the little mosquitoes and the littler gnats that swarmed in their long season—swarmed everywhere, all the time; a thing hard enough in any condition, but to the exhausted unbearable almost to the brink of suicide.

These things he was to learn at the cost of infinite pain. Other things he found he must unlearn, at scarcely a less cost—chiefly the delusion, fostered intangibly by all that he had read and heard, that gold was everywhere in these northern placer fields. He found out that while traces of it *were* everywhere—indeed, everywhere in the world, for that matter—gold in quantities that paid for working existed only in rare, restricted areas that were mighty hard to locate. The chief creeks of Borealis were such areas. But the well-established belief of the tenderfoot that if he were able to secure a claim on these creeks his fortune was made—this, too, was palpably fallacious, for ninety per cent of the Borealis claims were proving worthless, though the camp was a rich one.

Even the trenchant aphorism which so buoyantly flouts the geologist—"Gold is where you find it," meant only, when you *do* find it—as well that burly negro kenned whom Branchfield heard haranguing a little crowd on the streets of Borealis. His pack still on his back, dusty almost to whiteness, weary, disgusted—"I say gold is where you *caint* find it," he raspingly declared with rolling eyeballs.

Forced to let slip these anchors of faith, the argonauts were adrift indeed. But to go on, at least until the outfits were exhausted, was the invariable choice of the virile. For, curiously enough, they had burned their bridges behind them in passing into this strange, hard land.

A new land! To Branchfield and his like it seemed veritably a new world. Men were the same in general shape and size, and their language for the most part his. And there were trees—regular trees. And water—yellow, but still water—flowed downhill, as in his former world. The heavenly bodies, too, though more remote in the sky, were familiar. There identities served his intelligence for proof that he still lived on Mother Earth. But they were utterly irrelevant to his problems, which were those of a new and alien sphere of life which he had bartered for the old familiar sphere. In his damp blankets, almost groaning with the ache of an incredible bodily fatigue, he wondered whether all that he had learned and done and been were of the slightest value to him now.

The credit man was an infant here; his kind of knowledge was of no more avail to him than the knowledge which an infant might bring from a previous incarnation. He was set down in a wilderness. It was primitive, but every part and process of living, working, producing, was governed by complex mechanical laws of which the woodsman or farmer, turned prospector, knew something, but he, the store man of the city, knew nothing.

In a comfortable workshop the acquisition of this knowledge would have been difficult enough, especially to Branchfield, who had little taste for it. But to gain it under conditions in which mere living and moving involved the severest mental and physical strains, and with loneliness and hopelessness besides—it was a crucial test of stamina.

CHAPTER IX.

GRUFF GEORGE M'TAVISH.

A clear, sharp fall that froze every small stream and gave the mossy earth its first solidity warned the prospectors on the outlying creeks of the impending winter of great cold and darkness; and one after another of the loosely bound party fell away to seek shelter in cabin or drift. But the sturdier men, especially those provisioned for a full year or more, welcomed the winter as the better mining season, when the bed rock in likely places could be tapped at will—with hard labor, it is true, "burning down" every foot of the way through the cement-hard sands and gravels, but free from that *bête noir* of the Hyberborean miner—seepage, drowning him out of his prospect shaft. Branchfield, of course, was among the hundreds who stayed out.

The winter netted him for profit, besides the rudiments he acquired of the drifting game, a real partner, gruff George McTavish, a taciturn, deliberate man of seasoned years and of infinite pessimism. Being at first neighbors on distant Scroggie Creek, and quiet, almost silent, pipe companions of evenings, they at length joined forces and put down eight holes, five of them of a depth requiring the splicing together of their windlass ropes.

When nearing bed rock in the first deep hole, Branchfield, being pleasantly drowsy, failed to fill the bucket, and McTavish, suspecting the truth, roared to him to sit in the bucket and grip the rope hard. Wondering what had excited his dour windlassman, Bill humored him and came up, only to keel over when he reached the fresh air at the top and nearly fall back into the narrow black gulf. Wood gas had nearly made Mary Branchfield a widow!

When he recovered, McTavish sharpened both their axes, went to cutting cordwood, and sent Branchfield with a hand sled forty-three miles to Borealis City for five-inch stove pipe with which to ventilate the shaft.

That was Bill's first taste of a labor which was a twin devil of back packing over soggy moss. With the loop of rope under his arms and back of his neck, and the ever-bobbing gee pole in his numb fist, he scrambled up slippery hills, sweating, sometimes cursing, his breath that of a laboring ox, for four days straight on the return trip to camp.

They abandoned their barren prospect before the break-up of the overhill trail to the river, where they attacked a stand of burnt spruce poles on an island, and, with charcoal all about them, became negroes day and night. On beans and flour and an occasional hare they got out a raft of precious dry wood and floated it down with the ice to Borealis, taking their lives in their hands to earn enough to insure another year's prospecting.

They got hold of an abandoned shack near the town, and, waiting three weeks for the river to clear and the boats to bring news of home, had their first and only taste of near-comfort and idleness. The boat arriving, Bill became part of a living queue three blocks long that straggled in the genial sunshine, moving up a step at a time toward the post-office window. Bill took his little packet and joined the readers who were sitting in a line upon the log curbing of the sidewalk.

The previous summer the writing on the envelopes had been in various hands, Mary's, of course, predominating. But now there was little else than Mary's. One of the most popular of the younger set of business men of Centerville, being out of sight, was evidently out of mind.

How small and strange and dainty these white envelopes felt in his great, calloused, nervous hands. He arranged her letters in the order of their postmarks and read them, first in visual gulps, the second time more slowly.

He found them curious letters, painstaking—too much so, even for painstaking Mary. She said they were well and happy, considering their loneliness. They still had money—not so much, but they were going to get along nicely enough. Helen Gamble had been in. Also Mrs. Scollard. Tom Stickton had often inquired as to their welfare. There were many anecdotes of little Elsie; a year had accomplished wonders for her, and she was *such* a little help!

There was something—what was it, that was *painstaking* in the letters? It was more than Mary's carefulness. Restrained. That was it! There were things, Branchfield felt, which Mary took pains not to say.

Her endings were much the same. A consistent, rather set-minded woman, she had little versatility of expression. Their love and faith were with dad. They prayed always for his health and his success. She was his loving wife, Mary Branchfield.

His "success!" Bill glanced at himself and smiled. His "health?" Well, of that, at least, he had never possessed more. And though his year was up, the year that he had hoped would suffice, he felt free—since all was well at home—to go on for another year with gruff George McTavish. He thrust the letters in his overalls pocket and wound his way among the suburban stumps of Borealis to their camp. Gruff George eyed him from over the teeth of the two-man crosscut saw he was filing. And that eying of him said: "Well, do you go or stay?"

"We'll go," said Bill.

"Bueno," grunted McTavish, and went on with his rasping.

That night Bill wrote his letter. Heaven only knew when he should be able to mail another.

The long winter had brought him nothing, he told the woman who prayed for his success; but, reassured of their safety at home—although he wished he knew more exactly how matters stood—he and his partner, a most excellent man and skillful prospector, would go far afield into the Stewart River region, where McTavish had prospected in days gone by and had thought well of the country. In another year she should see him, if nothing happened, and for her sake—he was hardly conscious of the implication of the phrase—he hoped for "success."

He ended with the tender things that men of Branchfield's nature are able to really write only if the distance in time and space is really great. And he added a postscript of regard and remembrance to all inquiring friends. It was so like Bill, she thought when, weeks later, she read his letter; so like him never to doubt the hosts of inquiring friends even after a year of the change-producing life of a bustling little Western city.

It was thirteen months before he had a reply to this letter. They were thirteen months of change of living almost as complete as that of the first great change from Centerville to Borealis City. The mining camps had been exchanged for spaces of silence and solitude; their slender, light-draft poling boat with its contents were the only reminders of the world of men. Once, twice, before the shrunken Stewart disappeared under its shell of glare ice, these beings—several of them—floated by, bound for the Yukon camps. One party had slowed down in an eddy long enough to catch a letter Bill threw them.

Building a cabin as far up a side stream as they could drag their boat, they made light sleds of birch lashed with moosehide and prospected here and there all winter, living as aborigines might have lived a hundred or a thousand years ago. That they lived and worked at all was due mainly to the excellent camp craft of McTavish, a lore he had been all of thirty years in acquiring.

Jealously they had guarded their essential supplies, living upon the country as much as they dared. Even so, they probably would have gone soft with scurvy but for the rigid insistence of McTavish that they consume just so much each day of roots and frozen berries. But they came out in the spring with a little flour and beans and tea—enough to get over a deal of ground during the summer without having to waste its precious hours in a down-river excursion for supplies.

The clearing of the ice found the two comrades back on the Stewart, headed next day for a high northwestern tributary—the Mayo. Exactly thirteen months had passed since Branchfield sat on the log curb and read his letters.

CHAPTER X.

ON RIVER BARS.

It was the day-night of the Hyperborean realm. The moving plane of the river shimmered under a red sun, low and almost in the north. Impalpable mists were drawing into the chilling air.

They were camped at the lower end of an island bar bulwarked with driftwood—whole trees uprooted by the ice and cast sprawling, their roots kedged in the piling sands like the flukes of a hundred twisted anchors.

A pale smoke rose straight into the air from the embers of their supper fire, about which were a few grimy bags and blackened, dented pots. The two men, dead tired, were stretched out in the still-warm sands, smoking.

"Listen," said George.

A faint "plop" came up the open spaces of the river. After a little he said:

"Some one's flopping a trackline off of snags into the water."

"Likely, hey?" was Bill's incredulous comment.

"It's it," insisted McTavish. "Why not? A gang of fresh men could make it up here from the Yukon since the ice went out."

A snapping of dry sticks drew their eyes to the bend below. There was movement there in the thickets along the high cut bank. Then a line spanked the water again, and the bridled nose of a long poling boat thrust itself into view, pushing a curving riffle. A steersman, scarcely moving, held his paddle stiffly over the stern. Three men were on the line, keeping it clear of the jungle of brush and timber as they worked their way along the bank.

The partners puffed silently at their pipes. Men—white men—were nearing them; there was nothing to say. When the boat

was opposite them, the linemen stood still, allowing the boat to slack away against the bank. Then one of them jumped in and poled across the current till the boat grounded ten feet from the shore of the island. McTavish and Branchfield were at the water's edge.

"Hullo, boys," said the steersman quietly.

"Hullo," said the two men on the bar.

"Look 'em over," said the steersman; and he threw out a small canvas sack. Branchfield untied it and took out a packet of a dozen or more letters, each bearing a different name, though the same address—"Borealis City, Alaska."

"All somewheres up the Stewart, the postmaster said," explained the man in the boat. "We was willin' to take one apiece, last dates or first dates, one or the other. Pretty fierce current on this here river!"

Branchfield turned them over, very, very slowly—as though to give the hoped-for letter plenty of time to make itself one of the dozen. It did. It was the seventh. He seized it, stuffed it in his pocket and rapidly examined the remaining five.

"No use," grinned the steersman. "Only one apiece. You can bet your life on that! Chuck 'em back; we've got to keep moving."

Branchfield handed the letters to George, who did not bother to examine them. It was a thousand-to-one shot there was nothing for him. He tied up the bag and tossed it into the boat.

"Thanks, boys," said Branchfield.

"Anything you need?" asked the steersman, reaching up for a "hand-holt" on his fourteen-foot pole.

"No," said McTavish. "Much obliged."

"Well, good luck." And the boat shot across the current.

Gruff George threw some dry sticks on the fire, for the light had paled with approaching midnight. But Branchfield, answering an odd impulse of privacy, walked off to a high part of the sand bar, where he carefully opened his letter:

CENTERVILLE, May 3, 19—.

MY DEAR HUSBAND: As it is so uncertain whether my letters will reach you, or when you will get them, I have thought it best to repeat briefly in each letter what has happened since last year. Of course, you know that if you have been getting my monthly letters, and in that case much of what I write will not be news to you.

Naturally, I always begin with Baby Willie—

Branchfield felt a great thumping in his breast, as though he were felling a tree without pause. Mechanically he put his hand to his heart.

——who is so big and active now I don't know whether to call him a baby or not. But if by chance you don't know about him yet, I must first call him an infant, for you are surely entitled to know you have a *baby* son before you have a little boy.

He was born on February 17th of last year, *exactly* midway between Lincoln's and Washington's Birthday. For as soon as I was well enough I went to the library, leaving Mrs. O'Meara to look after the youngsters, and looked up the birth hours of those two great men, as nearly as their birth hours are known.

Twice I wrote you of it. I couldn't help writing about it. But each time I tore up the letter, for I knew—or at least I feared—it would bring you home before you were ready to come. I knew you had no idea of such a thing, for I myself only suspected it when you wanted to go to Alaska.

Will, it was hard to write letters to you last spring and summer, and conceal the poor little baby; the little son; I was *so* proud of him. Last fall when I knew that navigation would be closed and you could not come out, I told you about him.

I tell you all this, now, in each letter. And strange to say, the repetition does not seem monotonous. I'm sure it will not be monotonous to you!

A little brother for Elsie! Just think of her talking baby talk to him. She's such a little mimic; such a little mother. You'd laugh that quiet laugh of yours if you could hear her. She puts him to sleep by telling him all the things about his daddy that I tell her. She appears to think he will understand it better from her than from me, because she is little herself.

Master Branchfield is toddling around my legs this minute, grabbing tenaciously at my skirts whenever he loses his balance. He is as much like you as you always insisted Elsie is like me. And he is just as sensitive as you are, Will. His lower lip seems to be a kind of advance agent of his little heart.

I am glad you stayed. You know. I always said that you would not be likely to succeed in your undertaking in a year, though you had such high hopes of it. Men who went from Centerville and Ridgley have been drifting back, I hear. I only have seen one man. I think his name was Veriton or Veriman—something like that. He had never heard of you. He seemed sorry, and explained that there were thousands up there, scattered all over. And he said they were mostly sadder and wiser. But of course, being a failure himself, he was disgruntled. I was so sorry for him. He looked so shabby.

I am earning quite a little money now. And we are very well. The mortgage has been troubling me, of course, as it finally falls due in two months. But Tom Stickton has arranged in some way so that if you do not come out on the first boats I shall have another year. But that will be the only extension. Tom did not

say so, but I judge from the conversation I had with Mr. Fiske last winter that Tom must have had a hard time getting this promise of an extension.

Don't worry about us, as we shall get along. I want to feel that your mind is free to concentrate itself on your task, which is so hard, so hazardous and uncertain—poor boy! Your friends always inquire what success you are having when I see them—which is not frequently. Mr. Stickton used to call regularly—but not lately. But that is all right.

Perhaps you will get all my letters at the same time. I could not find out definitely about any winter mail going in over the ice, for the post-office people did not seem to know. Your little daughter and her mother pray for your safety and success, and the little son would, too, I know, if he could understand. Your loving wife,

MARY BRANCHFIELD.

He held the letter in his hand, his unseeing eyes fixed upon the far, vague horizon. But at length he walked the sands—on the opposite side from the camp, where the main current flowed under pale stars. A tired, slouching, tattered hulk of a man, up and down, up and down he walked. And the stars went out with the lifting disk of the sun, and the faint, promiseful smell of early morning had crept upon the air, before he unclenched his hands and crawled into his blankets.

CHAPTER XI.

ABOVE THE BARRIER.

Mayo River, the larger branch of the upper Stewart, trended eastward from a complex of high, volcanic spurs and ridges of the Yukon-Mackenzie watershed. Its mouth was wide and shallow, curving through great flat moose pastures that stretched away to forested areas upon distant flanking hills. In a still noon, under a high, clear sun, the smooth expanse of water, unmoving to the eye, lay burnished as if beneath far Southern skies. And great fields of thicket, red and brown, alternating with the open green of meadows waist-high in grass, completed an effect almost of tropic luxuriance and splendor. Only the sky, the sky that, summer or winter, belongs to the Arctic alone, mocked the illusion. It was Alaska—bathed in the glamour of its brief summertide. Only Alaska, but the tranquil, spacious beauty of it was a benediction upon the spirit. To Branchfield especially a heartening prospect was a boon indeed.

Following the shallow shore line, the men bent sturdily to their poles, sending their graceful little craft swiftly upstream for many miles. Three days of this they had, and then the flats drew into a barrier—a series of extensive moraines at the mouth of a high, terraced valley. Through these vast accumulations of débris of ancient ice fields the Mayo River broke in foaming torrents fretted by masses of conglomerate bowlders huge, almost, as pyramids. And here their work began.

Day after day they portaged their boat and relayed their outfit over these incredibly rough moraines, cutting their way through the junglelike vegetation with which it was overgrown. Both men grew gaunt and haggard under this ordeal before they gained open ground and safe water above the barrier.

In this higher valley of the Mayo—ancient base level of the Stewart system of waters—they encountered a contracted stream of average width and current, and settled down to a week of alternate poling and lining. But McTavish grumbled constantly over the varihued volcanic rock which encompassed them. Like most old prospectors, he had an eye single to "formation," and the formation did not please him.

Though unaware of it, they were pioneers above the morainal belt. Their predecessors up the Mayo, wearied by the breasting of the main Stewart, had invariably turned back at the gigantic and forbidding causeway of the barrier. All but *one*, perhaps—he of a remotely early day, upon whose history they were later moved to speculate with the most intense interest.

"Hell with it!" denounced the elder man, at the end of the week of steady poling and unvaried lava formation. "Gold never grew in this rock and never will."

"Let's hammer through to the divide," urged Branchfield, wiping the perspiration from his head and neck.

There was little hope left in the men. Alaska was to him a cinema of utter discomfort and weariness and loneliness, a long-drawn, phantasmal nightmare. He had often been amazed at the recuperative power—miracle of the cold countries—that had enabled him to conquer that bodily fatigue and go on and on. Sometimes he actually hated his body for the blessing of it.

But there was a moral logic in going on and on to the end. And on they went, past several tributaries, till one of these disputed the right of the now shallow Mayo to be

called the main stream. And this was not many miles from the Arctic divide where the waters flowed northward—the farthest in the whole western world—into the mighty Mackenzie.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TEA TOPER.

The old, old Indian woman in her caribou parka, squatting over her small fire in the dry sand, rocked herself gently to and fro, to and fro, and watched the steam from a copper pot suspended by green sticks over the coals of a little fire.

Her parka hood was thrown back. Her thick, unkempt hair was a drab gray—sign in a Northern Indian of great age indeed, though of that her deeply furrowed face with its sunken, filmy eyes was evidence enough.

Two moons had passed since she bade her kinfolk of the third and fourth generation to begone and leave her to the spirits that beckoned her on. Grayling minnows flung by ripples into shallow, beach sand-bowls, and a something in the narrow copper pot would keep her spark of life aglow until the happy end.

Like cloud shadows in a long April day, there passed and repassed before her mind a long procession of events—the paddling and paddling, the skinning of the caribou, the drying of the fish, the feasts and the famines, the rockings back and forth—crooning over the young, moaning over the dead. Snows and summers, peopled and moving; snows and summers endlessly backward. Feeble, palsied, almost blind, but without pain through every waking moment—and she slept but little—she was amused and content with the gray, unceasing pageant of the years.

Her head turned quickly at a sound—a sound as familiar as the voices of her children—the gritting of a boat on coarse river sand. There was a blurred image now in her sunken eyes of a long canoe, and the figures of two white men. They spoke to her. She grunted a greeting in response and stirred her fire.

Branchfield came up and studied her curiously while gruff George made camp.

"What have you got there?" Bill asked her, pointing to the battered kettle. She peered at him out of her squinting, rimless eyes and cupped an outstretched, skinny hand.

"H-e-e-e," she hissed.

"Hey, George!" called Branchfield. "See what you can make of the old lady. She wants something."

"They generally do," remarked McTavish. Setting a pot on his fire, he came up and spoke Indian words to her, receiving for reply some muttered gutturals.

"Sounds like Fort McPherson Siwash," he said. "I learned that lingo when I wintered with some whalers off Herschell Island." He spoke now hesitatingly to the squaw in a different dialect, recalling it with difficulty.

A ghastly grin stretched her shapeless lips. She closed her eyes and spoke almost with animation. And George replied, picking up the copper pot and examining its contents.

"It's tea she wants," he told Bill. "She's been brewing these leaves in here—same leaves—since last snow or the snow before. She's a tea toper!"

"One continuous debauch, hey?" Bill stigmatized it. "Two years on one pinch of tea."

He went to their camp and returned with a small bag. "Here, let's give her a new pinch."

McTavish took the bag in his hands. It was almost empty, and they had no more. Tea in the North! It is indeed the cup that cheers. The dry humor of his Scotch blood puckered his eyes.

"Fresh tea'd be too strong for her, Bill. She couldn't stand it. It would shorten her life."

Bill chuckled, but was unconvinced.

"The old leaves are durable, yet," insisted George. "They're good for another year or two, at least."

"See her hand wobble, and look at her face. Why, the old girl's mouth is watering for it. Just a pinch, George—now what do you say?"

"It'll bump her off, my boy, but all right."

"Well, she'll die happy, then," said Bill, and he gave her a generous pinch, and watched her with it till George called him to their supper.

While tea was the most precious of their remaining possessions, they had relatively no less of it than of other food. Their feet were almost bare. Their clothes, rent and tattered, could be patched no longer. In short, their plight had become desperate indeed, and after supper they debated a return to the Yukon.

"We're in schist country again," said George, summarizing the situation, "and I don't dislike the formation. But we're half naked, fresh meat's scarce, we're rationed down to a starvation diet, and I guess we're up against a proposition of turning tail and beating it to the bread line. Hullo, what's biting your lady friend? I'll bet that tea's given her spasms, you bloody murderer!"

The ancient squaw, in a high, thin voice, was patiently calling them. But though she had brewed and drunk new tea—nectar of the Indian gods—she seemed not worse, but better for it. She had managed to remove her thick, clumsy parka, and when the men reached her she was exploring the depths of a kind of buckskin shirt. Out of a grass basket at her side she drew a sewing knife and used it within the bosom of this garment. After many grunts she brought out a small, flat packet, slit it tremblingly, and presented the astonished Branchfield with a folded sheet of birchbark which had long ago broken at the creases. Both men examined it curiously.

It was a sketch of part of a creek with two tributaries, and of a rounded "hachured" hill with a circle of timber. There was a small cross at a point above the second tributary. Its only inscription, written in a scholarly, though unsteady, hand, was:

"Beyond the dreams of avarice."

"What in Sam Hill does that mean, do you suppose?" asked McTavish.

Bill said he believed it was part of a quotation about richness. "Ask her what the deuce it is, anyhow," he suggested.

A long and difficult colloquy followed with the wrinkled old dame, from which George emerged perspiring but enlightened.

"She says when she was a girl a great white man, who hated whites, put it in her hands before he died and commanded her to give it to some one who cared for others as much as for himself. That breed is scarce," asserted McTavish, "and she's carried it a long, long time."

"I guess the whole breed of white men are scarce in her country," conjectured Branchfield. "What's she doing this side of the divide, anyhow?"

"She says she's come to die near where this great white man lived."

"Aha! There's an old romance there, George, my boy. Near where he lived, hey? Then perhaps the creeks and the great round Dome are——"

"Why, I saw that hill, I'll bet, over the high timber to the north'ard when we rounded that last bend this afternoon. Not that I take any stock in them dope sheets—or the men that make 'em. They're either fakes or the kind that go crazy over a fly-speck color."

They washed the cups and plates in silence, and went to sleep. In the morning when they shoved off, the squaw was muttering over her second brew of new tea.

Very soon the flat top of the round mountain that they had seen the day before loomed over a low hill. The stream girdled this hill and brought them to the base of the mountain; and there, indeed, was a circlet of timber stretching around to another gulch—perhaps that of the second tributary depicted on the birch map. Rocks now choked the shallow channel, and fearful of injuring the precious poling boat, they threw it on the bank and made their way on foot to the farther gulch, and beyond it to about the distance of the cross. They panned dirt in several places. There was nothing.

But Branchfield, undaunted, reasoned:

"He's an educated man; a careful man. He had no paper, and probably he made this ink, and he made it from age-defying pigments, too. This map is *exact*. And I'm going to figure it out exactly on the ground."

It was a problem in proportion. There was the distance between the tributaries on the map and the distance from the upper one to the cross. If he could get the ratio of the one to the other, he could pace off on the ground the same proportionate distance, and locate the point where the cross should be. But to devise a unit of measure to use on the frail, brittle birchbark taxed his ingenuity. He finally resorted to a line of sand, whose grains he counted—much to George's disgust, for it was a three hours' job. The pacing of the stream, which gave him the place indicated by the cross, was a much briefer task.

And near the point so located, the experienced eye of McTavish detected traces of an old disturbance of the earth in a shallow draw. From it he brought a pan of gravel, and, being about to wash it, stirred the dirt curiously.

"Oh, hell," he growled cheerfully, flinging the gravel away, "you don't have to pan dirt like that. *Eureka!*"

"Eureka?" echoed Branchfield. "What's that?"

"Means 'I have found it.' "

"You mean——"

"May be a pocket, but sure is rich beyond those dreams he quoted about." McTavish had "struck it" many times before; he took it coolly; but Bill went white.

"You're sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure. We can pan out a grubstake there and come back and sluice out a bank roll—if she's not a pocket." He looked around him intently.

"Why, man," he cried, "if it ain't old Jason Hallidie's purple schist formation! I've been looking for it twenty-seven years."

Gold actually visible in dry dirt had evoked in him moderate enthusiasm. But this just-right formation, fabled among an older generation of Northern prospectors, roused him to the highest pitch of excitement.

"Start panning, Bill," he directed instantly. "I'm going to pound up some of this long-lost mica schist."

Branchfield spent the rest of the afternoon between the bank of the dry channel of the gulch and a panning pool in the creek.

Incongruous were the elements of his consciousness on that dazed afternoon. There were bodily sensations of fingers numbed by hours of immersion in ice water, and a spine aching to its marrow from bending over. There were visual impressions of dissolving muck, revealing clean bright gold, both fine and coarse, with here and there a roughened nugget still clasping bits of milk-white quartz. And mingled with these realities—which seemed a dream—there were pictures, self-conjured by his winged mind, that seemed realities—a river boat, a steamship, the Inland Passage, Seattle, a railroad train, Mary, the little daughter, the chubby little cherub of a son. And there was Tom, and Harry, and his coterie of the Mammoth Store—the cheerful, easy, kindly sociability of all his friends—his friends.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PAY STREAK OF THE PURPLE SCHIST.

It never rains but it pours. Early next morning McTavish got two mountain sheep—a providential windfall, enabling them to tarry a few days to stake claims and pan out a grubstake without the risk of starving on the long down-river run. Then they started for the main Stewart, and after struggling through the chaos of the barrier, floated night and day on the swift current of the rivers until the outlying tents of Borealis gleamed suddenly, like white moths, in a distant curve of the shore.

Gruff George McTavish now tutored his less sophisticated partner in the rudiments of mining-camp self-protection—the all-essential "don'ts" to be observed by the man who has really found something.

"Lie: we've been working out on the creeks—these here creeks—all summer for wages and a twenty-per-cent interest. Nobody'll bother you about names and numbers as long as we been on regular mined creeks. But if you let your best friend know you've been taking gold from a new place, and you name that place to be anywhere within a hundred miles of where it really is—well, either load up with an arsenal of automatics or quit the country cold. Nobody's expected to have any honor or conscience about new ground. The most decent jumps your claim while you're nursing his dying partner; the less decent merely cuts your throat while you're snoring in your sleeping bag. Write that down on the tablets of your memory, Hamlet—which you so love to spout. And: *Keep your mouth shut!*"

"But isn't there ground enough for others, George—for a few hard-striving, unlucky ones?"

McTavish, at the steering oar, regarded his big, bearded pal with commiseration.

"You poor bleating lamb, what folks won't do to you before you die! And say, being that you sometimes mutter in your sleep, I'm a-goin' to stand guard over your innocent slumbers every night we've got to stay in Borealis—which I hope'll be durn few."

And he did. At the lodging house that night he and Bill made out a list of supplies and equipment, including a string of dogs and two light basket sleds. And then he put Branchfield to bed and drank coffee and smoked his pipe all night, tilting his chair against the flimsy canvas partition of the room. He had a huge red bandanna close at hand with which to play Othello to Branchfield's Desdemona should the latter take to talking in his sleep. But Bill was "dead to the world" for many hours.

After breakfast George again admonished him: "You're purchasing agent of this mining company—*not publicity agent!* Don't

open your mouth except to buy. I'm going to bed."

Bill disobeyed instructions at the first place he visited. But that place was the post office, and he opened his mouth only to utter his own name. His reward for this technical breach of discipline was a bunch of monthly letters from Mary. There was one missing—the one that had been brought to him on the Stewart.

He learned a great deal about two small children, but little or nothing on a subject of great interest and not a little concern to him—how their mother was "earning quite a little money at home."

"We'll stop all that, whatever it is," muttered her husband as he hastily left the log post office and crossed the street to another log building, that of the Miners and Merchants Bank of Borealis. There he hurriedly asked for a draft on the "outside" for five hundred dollars.

"You seem to be in something of a rush," ventured the cashier politely. "What's the idea?"

"Why, I've only a day or so in town," explained Branchfield, "and I want to get this into the mail at once so as to be sure it goes out on one of the last boats."

"The last boat has left, my friend, and you've got all winter to buy drafts in."

"But we passed a boat on the river only a day or two ago."

"That was it, I expect."

So! He could not even write Mary of his "success." Dejectedly, he cashed his gold dust and went about his day's business.

Late that afternoon McTavish arose, recaulked a leaky seam in the poling boat, and in the evening was ready to mount guard again at the bedside of his sleeping partner. In the morning they loaded up and were off—after loud arguments with their new family of Malemutes.

They bucked slush ice from the second day. Nevertheless, they managed to make the mouth of the Stewart before the river stopped flowing. Here they cached their outfit on old Split-up Island—scene of final dissolution of many an ill-formed prospecting partnership—and after a night or two of crackling zero weather, began relaying their supplies over the glare ice, making excellent progress until the first heavy snows came. Then their pace was slower.

On Christmas Day, in a round hole that needed no thawing where her little fire had burned all fall, they buried the frozen, huddled form of the old native woman, and set an empty tea cannister above her grave. And in the waning afternoon light they made a permanent camp on the site of their heritage from her—the claims of the purple schist.

They were safe. No human being had crossed their trail, and they were sure of at least one winter's unmolested mining. It was an open winter, fortunately for them. This was a great advantage. They got meat for themselves and their dogs, adding thus to the store of dog salmon found frozen in shallow riffles farther down the Mayo, which they had piled up as they ascended the river. Also, they were able to build and chink a fairly comfortable cabin, in which they hewed out a windlass drum and timbers and two gravel buckets, besides a wood sled with birch runners. Lastly, before the snow became too deep, they were able, with the aid of the dogs, to accumulate quite a store of dry wood, indispensable for thawing their shafts and drifting underground.

On new ground, in a new country, two men, no matter how stout or how skillful, make little show in a single winter. Their dumps were small, but the pay dirt was at least as good as the best of world-known Borealis, and they were more than content.

In late April, when water drove them from their drifts, they whipsawed three lengths of sluice-box lumber, cut a ditch that carried half a sluice head of surface water, and shoveled in as fast as the glorious old sun would thaw their gravel. Bill had discreetly omitted the purchase of large buckskin pokes, fearing what this might signify to the clerk; so they used baking-powder cans to store the proceeds of their daily clean-up of dry and blown gold dust.

They took down their boxes, covered them with boughs, nailed the door of their cabin, and before the ice was out of the Mayo—though it was perilously rotted—they sledded down to within twenty miles of their cached boat at the Stewart. That twenty miles of gold-dust packing by both men and dogs along the swampy, densely brush-grown bank, swarming with ravenous mosquitoes, took them longer than all the rest of the journey. But they reached their boat, set it in the water, pushed out into the stream, and became part of one of nature's most awe-inspiring pageants—the going out of the ice upon a great, Northern

river. McTavish, being in no hurry, had been for waiting; but there was no wait in Branchfield. It was a chanceful voyage, but their craft was light, and they were expert rivermen. They reached Borealis with the last of the ice, and were nearly swamped in the surge from the bows of the *Canadian* as that steamer slipped from her ways and plunged into the river.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CYNIC'S ADVICE.

Their procedure now was simple and obvious. First they tied their dogs to a stranded scow, and then they lugged their dust to the bank in a dunnage bag. It was very heavy, and Branchfield, powerful man though he was, dumped it gladly on the floor, where the cashier regarded it with considerable interest. Evidently he decided that these two men were worth the attention of the manager, for he called that official to meet them. In the conversation that followed McTavish, by tacit agreement, did the talking, or rather the answering, for the manager of the Miners and Merchants Bank was suavely curious.

George's answers were highly diverting to his partner, who covertly surveyed him with amazement. From a rarely honest man, as Bill knew him to be, he had turned at a breath into one of the most finished liars that Bill had ever known. His method seemed to be to reverse everything—east was west, earth was sky, summer was winter. He simply turned the truth inside out! Only the hardest kind of knocks, Bill reflected, could have given this dour but excellent man either the will or the ability to transform himself thus into a frontier Munchausen. If the astute manager suspected that he was being "strung," he was too good a business man to show it.

He promised to assay the dust in record time, and, as instructed, to keep the two pokes of nuggets intact. Then the legs of Bill's old overalls were untied, the baking powder cans were opened and their yellow contents poured into the pan of the huge gold scales, and the cashier gave them a temporary receipt for three thousand four hundred and thirty-five ounces of gold dust and for two sealed pokes—the manager sealed them—"weighing approximately one hundred and seventy-eight ounces and said to contain nuggets." Whereupon Branchfield made a hasty exit, stumbled across the muddy street to the post office—followed part of the way by the tolerant grin of his partner—and added himself to the tail of the line.

There was no need to ask whether the first boat had come down the river. The line itself answered that question. It was, as usual, a long line, and Bill wanted to leave it and go directly to the window and say: "Give me letters, quick!" But he never would have done it. For he felt, rather than saw, in many of these men an eagerness and anxiety equal to his own. And though he did not realize it, he would, in a pinch, have given his place to any distressed one of them. That was Branchfield—the essence of him; so much so, in fact, that he did not know that few would have given their places to him.

He took his letters out into the sunshine and found his old place at the log curbing of the street. He selected the latest letter and opened it with quickened heart.

Most of it was just Mary's plain, practical, matter-of-fact letter. But at the end was something of the inner Mary. The winter was past, the third winter, and a long one—a long one. But now, for several weeks, the flowers were bright, and the birds sang and sang in the garden and in the shade trees out on the sidewalk. Those trees out there were taller and they nearly touched—they, too, felt the passage of time. And then—reserved for the end, as though the telling came hard—she hoped he could come out very soon. Not that she minded the struggle as long as her strength lasted, but she feared she could not face it with the home gone. He knew, of course, that early in July the year would be up—the year beyond which no extension of the mortgage could be obtained. To be ordered out of the house with the two little ones——

Branchfield read no further just then. A sloshing in the muck of the street woke him from his painful reverie. A banner, carried by a large boy, read:

TO-MORROW AT 2 P. M.
The Large and Commodious Steamer
CANADIAN
Will sail for Skagway, Seattle, and the outside!

There was so much to do, and so little time in which to do it, that Bill had to cease speculating upon the things that Mary

Branchfield had *not* said in her letters. He was on the whole a gloriously happy man, and he set about the business of departure with a vehement energy. The securing of their claims by filing upon them in the recorder's office came first. And then he and McTavish visited a lawyer, who made out powers of attorney and sundry other papers.

They found the old shack of two years ago occupied, but for a consideration the new owners vacated it, and George and the Malemutes took possession. Here, too, Bill passed his last night in Borealis—unguarded now during his slumbers, since the shack stood well out of earshot of its nearest neighbors.

Nothing would satisfy Branchfield but he must look up his trail companions of the first summer, and learn if they were in need. But no trace of the old prospecting party could be found.

"However," agreed gruff George, "I'll keep an eye out for them, and if I hear tell of any of that bunch of pals of yours I'll feed 'em with a spoon and try to be as big a damn fool as you'd be if you was here."

"I don't think you could, you old pessimist," said Bill. "But you'll be just as decent to them. For that's what you really mean."

Shortly after one o'clock they went to the bank for the accounting, and Branchfield took his share mostly in drafts. Then the manager handed him more drafts, made out in favor of George McTavish and indorsed to Branchfield. Bill turned to his partner in perplexity.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Oh, I made a trip in here when the bank opened this morning, that's all," replied McTavish.

"But what do I want with your money?"

McTavish took him aside. "What do *I* want with it—beyond about five thousand that's left? Haven't I got troubles enough protecting the claims from this horde of human Malemutes while you're outside? And as far as that goes," he added with a canny smile, "you're leaving me a million or so worth of pay streaks up on that tea plantation of ours, as security. I've got all the best of it."

Not content with that, he slipped his poke of nuggets into Bill's pocket, as a present for Bill's "new trouble-maker," meaning Bill, junior. Branchfield expostulated, but to no purpose, and gave him up as a bad job.

When they left the bank, McTavish took Bill around the corner, lighted his pipe, and carefully surveyed the younger man from head to foot.

"Well," said Bill uncomfortably, "what do you see?"

"A pretty tough-looking guy, even for an Alaska miner," replied his critic. "Ain't you going to buy any clothes?"

"Sure," said Branchfield, somewhat relieved, for his partner's inspection had been a searching one. "As soon as I get home I'll have an outfit that you wouldn't recognize me in."

"Why not get it now?"

"What's the use? The line they carry up here would hardly do in Centerville, which is an up-to-the-minute little burg, I want to tell you. I'd simply have to throw them away at the end of the journey."

McTavish smoked a while and frowned.

"I've seen a lot of life in the States, at one time and another." A look came into the eyes that roved over Bill's rough and faded shirt, his old overalls, his shapeless hat. "And living close with a man for two years, and listening to him mutter in the night, you get to know him—— I don't think you could stand it!"

"Stand what?"

"To be humiliated."

"Longest word I ever heard you say, George. But strangers don't count, and among your friends, what's the difference. It'll be fun to show 'em how we look in the North."

"Yes, great fun, I'll bet," drawled McTavish sententiously. "Now take it from me, son, if you look to be up against it something's going to happen—and right away, before you get a chance to show 'em your wad."

"Oh, you don't know my friends, old man." He laughed delightedly at the absurdity of it.

"But just to humor you, here goes. Come along and help me pick them out. We haven't much time." He hustled George through the crowd to a clothing store, and was about to enter it when three sharp blasts from the *Canadian's* whistle brought them to a sudden halt in the doorway.

"Too late," said George, "you've just got time to get aboard."

The two men joined the throng of belated passengers who were hurrying to the riverside. At the foot of the gangplank Bill

gripped the hand of one of the best men he had ever known, and McTavish was doing the same. Then Branchfield climbed aboard, and the *Canadian* swung out into the current of the mighty river.

A journey from the civilization of the temperate zone to the primeval wastes of the frigid, exerts upon the responsive a sense of passing through the ages. But it is the objective world alone that is concerned in this backward turning of the great clock. The traveler, in himself, plays little part, for throughout the journey he remains the same man he was at the beginning. Life itself has added nothing to the effects upon him of the changing world without.

It is different with the exiles of the North returning after years spent in the vast wilderness of it. They are like men reborn. In their quietness, in their brooding eyes, is something of the bewilderment of the infant —stranger to life. But it is more than that. For in them, unlike in the infant, memories stir in their shallow graves.

Like screen pictures dissolving, the North fades and the South takes shape. Steamers pass; towns of ever-increasing size nestle in every inlet of the coast; an excursion boat, shooting out from a point, is crowded with women and girls that greatly outnumber the men—strangest sight of all to the Alaskan, used to a dearth of women. On his own vessel, men emerge from state rooms in "good" clothes—in collars and neckties and creased trousers. There is a cheerful bustle; infinite petty details of preparation, as though the strenuous spirit of the teeming world had come out to them through the air, like a contagion. It effects in them a subtle wariness of manner, foreshadowing caste and class. While still cleaving an element fluidly constant to all lands and all times, they sniff the nearing presence of the master, civilization, and stiffen in salute!

Branchfield had been tired—bodily tired, through and through. He had slept and lounged and rested, lethargically, day after day of the upriver leg of his long journey. This had largely passed. But there were strains of a deeper sort, from which recovery was a far slower process—harsh stresses upon an unbending will, to which for three long years he had nerved himself in an environment and an employment alien to every bent of his nature. He had been, indeed, a buggy horse put to plowing a rocky field.

Indomitable perseverance, his youth and health, and that love of his kind which had created his need and sent him forth, had barely sufficed to keep him, grim-faced, teeth set, to his task. And he would have caved at the last but for the luck that crowned the struggle. The stimulant of it, reaching deep, had brought to his use the very last of his latent powers of mental and moral endurance, and he had quaffed this elixir till the cup was dry. He laughed easily; he saddened easily. He was a deeply scarred man, and scar tissue is of a hard and morbid fibre.

Such was Branchfield as his home journey drew to an end. But being the least introspective of men he realized nothing of this.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RETURN.

The *St. Elias,* of the Inland Passage fleet, slipped through the Sound in the dawn of July 3d. Over the distant Cascades a pale-gold sky reflected the light of the unrisen sun upon the inland waters, now narrow between islets of blackish fir, now wide as a great lake whose shores were yet vague shadows.

Branchfield stood in the bow of the boat, reverently greeting, as he had reverently parted from, this scene—his hat in his hand, his forehead bared to the land—his land.

An hour later, others came on deck and set their luggage by the rail, for the vessel was nearing Seattle. The Stewart River man was ready. When he arose he had changed his underclothing and thrown the old away. He had not even a bundle to carry. His hands were empty—ready, both of them, to clasp those of his friends.

Around a long point, and the big city of hills was suddenly revealed, still in shadow, thick-packed with houses to its serrated sky line. It was a strange sight to the Alaskans, grown used to a perspective in which the human habitation is a mote in a vast landscape. The miner at Bill's elbow, who called them rabbit warrens, was natively of the frontier breed, and could see the city in an ill aspect. But Branchfield, of a different type, regarded it as a triumph over Nature of the great society of Man. The two men were opposites. Could they have exchanged their natures there at the rail, Bill's homecoming would have been a different story!

Miles of flat wharves, lying upon forests of slender piles; lines of streets running

straight back from the water; façades and roofs of exact angles—tens of thousands of objects, all of a kind of symmetry never seen in nature. Branchfield was never insensible to nature, which made to him its own appeal. But he thrilled to this! This was the work of hundreds of thousands of brethren hands. It was life. From head to foot he tingled with an humble sense of resurrection.

His fellow humans now crowded the deck about him in the vicinity of the starboard rail, a length of which was being unshipped to receive the gangplank. They seemed almost automatically to have assorted themselves. Nearest the coveted place of debarkation were clustered the suit-case people—men who had boarded the boat at towns on the way, and some merchants, traders, and gamblers from Borealis and Skagway. Flanking them were the men with dunnage bags, or without baggage—laborers, fishermen, workers from the collieries of Vancouver Island and miners from the Far North—among them Branchfield, of course. Two deck hands bored roughly through them, dragging a hawser toward the stern, and the third mate roared to them to stand clear. He spoke more politely to the bearers of the suit cases, upon whom neither crew nor officers used their elbows. Branchfield perceived these things, but it was not till hours later that he was conscious that he had perceived them. Just now he was too elate with the glory of his return!

Down the narrow gangway they raced like liberated sheep—the suit-case bearers first! Despite the early hour, relatives and friends in numbers greeted many of the passengers, and swept them off—undoubtedly to breakfast. There was none there to greet Bill, but what of that? Home was only three hours away, and the joy of a great surprise to every one was to be his, as well as theirs. He could only stand still and chuckle, now—and chuckle he did till a ship's officer, rudely elbowing him aside without an apologetic word, made him aware that he was in the way. He dodged awkwardly between empty trucks that were rumbling to their work, and entered a barber shop just opening for business.

Something of the boy had returned to him when, on the deck of the *St. Elias,* he had debated whether or not to shave his beard. He rather relished the idea of mystifying many of his friends, but vanity won. A beard did not become him, and—well, after three hard years, and with his tan and all—he probably looked different enough anyhow to puzzle not a few.

After the shave and haircut he decided he would have a good breakfast of fresh ham and eggs and hot cakes and real maple syrup, and by that time the clothing stores would be open.

Between the barber shop and the Japanese restaurant whose sign caught his eye—he was still in the water-front district, among produce houses—he encountered a merchant about to enter his store. With this man he had had frequent business transactions in the offices of the Mammoth Store. Branchfield held out his hand.

"Sherwood, isn't it? You used to know me——"

Very adroitly Sherwood avoided the hand and glanced suspiciously at the ex-credit man.

"I don't now," he said shortly, and entered his store. Bill felt that this was amusing, but somehow his hand seemed cheated.

Over his ham and eggs, he turned the pages of a morning paper for the time-tables. Scanning the now unfamiliar columns, he was startled to see that the morning train of the Centerville, Spokane & Eastern left in twenty minutes. Gulping his coffee, he threw a dollar bill upon the table and rushed from the place. And he waited ten minutes at the depot for the local—which left exactly on time.

Though the train ride was a part of his memorable return, it was without incident, and he would not have remembered it long but for the peculiar way he felt. He was *really* nearing home. He was speeding past towns and villages, pretty, beautiful, memory stirring—but of no consequence except as milestones on the way to Centerville, his home. He sat in a very stupor of beatitude. His body, sunk in the red plush of the car seat, was an inert habitation for the swelling, vibrant spirit of him that would have leaped the prison bars of his frame and outsped the train to Centerville. The stern-faced, rock-hard stemmer of great river currents was levitated; he was a dancer upon pink air; he was adamant dissolved in froth and bubbles.

The open window framed for him a swiftly changing landscape of farm and woodland, bathed in the warm, delightful haze of the July morning. But this was but a background for images which the intoxi-

cated man projected as upon a screen. He saw himself in "the office" suddenly confronting his old chief. A moment's bewilderment, and then Fenwell Henderson: "*Hul*-lo, old scout. Holy Moses, if it ain't old Bill," and the hearty wringing of four hands. But Henderson draws his own away, wincing. "Is that the way they cripple their enemies in Alaska, you old bear!"

"Oh," says Bill offhandedly, "gripping a shovel and pick for a year or two, you know. Yes, I'm hard as nails."

The scene shifts magically to the street. They happen by in succession—they all stare a second—old Jonesey, and Luke Cassett, the credit man of the Centerville Emporium; and Bob Price, always just inside the lobby of his great little hotel—all of them. An incredulous stare it is, and then —their eyes pucker, their faces wrinkle and wreathe in smiles, and the glad hand and hearty shake! Often the other hand goes to his shoulder; they push him gently away, surveying him at arm's length, the better to get the whole effect, the *tout ensemble* of Bill Branchfield, the returned miner. "Gosh," they say, "don't he look the part? Rough? Look at his get-up. The real thing, all right, all right!"

A woman on the street—Mrs. Keefer, dear old, stylish Mrs. Keefer—actually screams at the suddenness of the apparition.

"Will, why Will! If it isn't Will, returned at last from that dreadful country, after years—yes, years and years, isn't it?"

And old Mr. Chisholm at the bank. What a fine, stately leave he had taken of Bill—son of his old business associate. *His* congratulations would be particularly interesting and significant. How he would raise his fine eyebrows at the drafts and greenbacks, and the soft buckskin poke of nuggets. The bank president, expert money changer that he was, would "heft" that little bag uncertainly, and ask rather sheepishly what its value might be. And Bill would laugh heartily, slap him lightly on the back, and assure him magnanimously that here, on the "outside," not even a banker should be expected to size up gold in the raw. And then he'd make Chisholm guess!

And Tom? There were things to be explained, but, of course, they would be—they must be. And then Tom would be all right, gloating with him in his way of quiet cordiality, over the good fortune—the best of it being that Bill himself was safe and sound back to Mary and the children. That was unselfish, sane old Tom.

Mary? But the thought of her and the babies was over and through all the rest. He could make no new images of *them* in his return, for there his fancy had long ago exhausted itself.

Thus visioning incessantly his welcome, skimming the cream of it in advance, he was ready to yell with joy as the clanging train drew into the station, and the air darkened under the big train shed. Still gazing from the window while others arose, he almost missed being among the first to step out upon the solid earth of Centerville.

Now a "home town" may be either of three kinds with respect to its instinctive attitude toward men dressed as William Branchfield happened to be dressed.

There is first the small country town or village, where the men who wear finely woven woollen suits, collars and ties, and hats, hard or soft-creased, are a minority that derive the wherewithal to dress in that fashion by serving the majority in mine, farm, or workshop. Here the man you encounter in the afternoon in top boots, corduroys, and hickory shirt may own half the township in one corner of which your Springdale humbly nestles. In the evening, as like as not, he will be resplendently attired. So your small-town men, accustomed to deal in a business way and to fraternize socially with citizens of the roughest externals, are scarcely aware of a man's garb. Prudence, if not common sense, restricts the very consciousness of clothes.

In the large city, on the other hand, the mechanic or laborer sheds his working clothes before he sallies forth. And the farmer or rancher or woodsman enters the city garbed in urban apparel or else purchases it at once. It follows that if you see your acquaintance on the downtown streets dressed in jeans and jumper it is in the nature of something unheard of. Instead of passing him by with the usual nod of recognition you stop him and inquire the meaning of the queer togs. Is he on his way to a fancy-dress ball in the character of a gas fitter, or, while cleaning up the chicken yard at home has he been called suddenly to rescue a drowning relative? Your acquaintance may, in fact, have pawned his only suit of regular clothes, but you will not suspect that, and just so your encounter with him

is in either a very large or a rather small place, he is quite safe from the humiliation of a snub.

Centerville belonged in a class midway between these. It was neither a small town nor a large city. The sight of working clothes, harmlessly familiar to the former and as harmlessly unfamiliar in the latter, became in Centerville a circumstance of invidious significance. Especially was this so if the wearer were recognized as one who had occupied a genteel walk of life.

CHAPTER XVI.

GREETINGS!

Branchfield hopefully scanned the faces of the people hurrying hither and thither about the station. Vaguely familiar were many of them, and very definitely familiar were the faces of several. They were meeting arriving passengers or taking leave of others who were about to board the train. As he walked slowly toward the gate and out through the lobby of the station building, they glanced at him, some of them quite sharply. But if they knew him—and he fancied they almost did—they gave no sign.

"Of course, I look sort of different," thought Bill. But he meant his face and figure. In the state of mind he was in he had quite forgotten his clothes. Momentarily he felt disappointed and a little forlorn as he went out into Cedar Street, the cross street that led to the heart of the town. He might have taken a car through the city and out into the residence district on the other side, where his home was. But the sight of those greetings in the train shed in which he had had no part made him hanker acutely for the sight of an intimate, and he decided to walk to Washington Street where he would be sure to bump into some of his many friends before he went on across town to his home.

It was a momentous decision!

The town had grown. He found Cedar Street already lined with stores, though Washington Street, the city's main artery, was still three blocks away. It was here that he met his first old acquaintance.

In spite of her smart attire, he knew her at a hundred yards. It was Lucy Beck, his once dowdy little stenographer, always on the verge of tears. With her was a very elegant young man wearing a finely woven Panama, highly polished light-tan shoes, carefully creased trousers, a well-tailored coat, a rich silk tie and a high collar. The two were a pretty sight to Bill. As they approached he murmured almost aloud: "Little Lucy Beck—to think that the first was to be little Lucy Beck!"

He stopped squarely in front of them and raised his hat. The elegant young gentleman looked cynically amused, while the girl stared frightenedly. Branchfield was delighted!

"Don't know me—Branchfield, of the credit department? The letters, and letters, and more letters I used to dictate to you!"

Perhaps she was no longer a stenographer and did not wish to be reminded of it in the young man's presence. Certainly she was no longer a pathetic, shabby little figure. As she recognized him she colored.

"Oh, it's Mr. Branchfield," she said reluctantly, darting an anxious, half guilty glance at the youth, bored now and impatiently twirling his cane. Mechanically she had started to put out her hand, but she withdrew it again.

"How've you been? It's a nice morning, isn't it?" she murmured rapidly. And she followed her escort who, by way of suggestion, was already moving off.

Bill found he, too, had put his hand out. But he had not withdrawn it. Nor had his other hand yet replaced his old felt hat on his head. He turned and looked at their backs as the two young people sauntered on, the girl still glancing sidewise at her companion as she talked to him—of Branchfield, no doubt. Bill wondered—though he should have known better—if she was telling the youth of the money he had given her on that last Saturday before he left. For he had often recalled it and been glad of it. How she had thanked him, with a few more tears! Tears! An unfailing sesame to his sympathies and pocket. The loyalty of most such tears to their shedders alone had never occurred to Bill, who had not been given to analyzing the emotions to which his own responded.

As he stood there, the thing that is called a pang went through him, and he felt peculiar, a little sickish—a reaction, no doubt, from the high feather of his rhapsodies on the train.

As yet he did not understand. He knew only that something serious—something almost mortal, if she had meant more to him—had happened or was impending. His

feet carried him along the sidewalk, but he saw nothing, for his eyes were turned inward, blinking at whatever it was that had glared at him in this swift and stunning encounter.

A block, two blocks, and then—another person he knew was almost upon him. And, curiously enough, it was another fellow worker at the Mammoth Store. It was Graham, the cashier. No contemptible little underling this time, but an equal and an intimate. He'd tell it to Graham and laugh it off with him. In the excitement of this new meeting he ceased for the moment to feel the pang.

As paying teller of the big department store, prompt delivery of the envelopes on pay day required that Graham immediately recognize some hundreds of employees as each approached the window. He knew their faces halfway down the aisle. And by this developed faculty he recognized Bill Branchfield a trifle sooner than Bill recognized him. Being worldly wise, he also sized up certain circumstances physically connected with this long-vanished friend. They were perturbing. They made him definitely uneasy. If he had not known Branchfield so long and so intimately once, it would not be so—so difficult. For he simply *had* to be nice to him; it would be as brutal to cut him as it would be absurd to pretend that he did not recognize him.

Again Bill's heart was in his face and eyes, as he beamed on "old Graham."

"Well!" he exclaimed, with a happy grin. A breathless, palpitant expectancy was in that one explosive word.

Graham was brought squarely to a stop. And his worldly wisdom was entirely at his command. Its keynote was a quiet dignity and the reverse of effusiveness. As he submitted for a moment to Bill's handshake, he said casually:

"Hullo, Branchfield. Back from the North?"

"Yes," said Bill with difficulty. He felt a fretting of the pang. There was a pause—a pause that must not grow, so Bill killed it with more words—words that came in ghastly semblance of the debonair.

"It's three years since you gave me my last pay envelope."

No more unfortunate allusion could have been made. For at this mere suggestion of money, Graham's athletic worldly wisdom fairly leaped to his protection. He cleared his throat.

"Yes," he said, in a kind of impersonal, droning drawl, "a long time—quite a while. Things change fast—town's on the blink—money tight as hell. *I'm always broke.*"

Most adroitly he was edging around Bill.

"Well, see you again." He smiled feebly and was off.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AWAKENING.

Branchfield was aware of a furiously burning face; of a mouth that twitched and trembled; of a nausealike sickness in the chest. He stepped to the curb and looked at the dirt in the center of the street, for he wished to see nothing, in order that he might think.

His brain was stunned for a few moments—then it raced. Facts marshaled themselves before it. If a drowning man is witness to a reliving of his life in instantaneous panorama, Branchfield saw, in a less swift review, every incident, every circumstance of three and four years ago wherein all human beings near and dear to him had played a part. Visually, it took form as a series of concentric circles, with wife and chums girdling him closely, and friends, acquaintances, and fellow workers in surrounding curves. And these had color—ripplingly bright hues that swiftly tarnished to dull and gray, as though they were woven of a tricking light that failed. Time, too, was there. The circles whirled upward from past years to recent months and weeks, thrusting the face and voice and warning finger of George McTavish, gruff misanthrope who had shaken himself free of the dust of cities. That familiar, rugged form wove himself curiously into a pattern of the journey's end—the steamer's landing; the aloofness of the suit-case folk; the elbowings of the officers; Sherwood; the furtively staring faces at the depot; the girl he had befriended; Graham! What was that ridiculous thing George had said?

"If you look to be up against it, something's going to happen—before you get a chance to show 'em your wad."

Some instinct told him to turn about. He did, and crossed the sidewalk to the plate-glass window of the store in front of which he had been standing. The rear of the show window was a mirror, and looking therein Branchfield saw, for the first time in three years, *himself*, from head to foot. Intently he gazed at his image.

Did men look like this in the North? Certainly; his memory told him they did. But for many hours, now, he had been "home." The big city, the crowded train, the depot, Centerville—civilization again, with all its wonted garmenture filling his eyes, awakening responses from the cells of his brain, image-charged for years, had all but crowded out the shallower pictures of the rough life of the Northern frontier.

He was gaunt, rough; a man of toil. A changed Branchfield, indeed; but still Branchfield—the friend of his friends, with an unblotted past of loyalty and kindness. Gaunt, rough, yes, but what of it!

What of it? He was going stupid again. But as he took off his hat and passed his fingers through his hair it came to him, with the reëcho of McTavish's warning: "If you look to be *up against it!*" That was it. It was not merely that he was a man of toil, but that he seemed a man who had been forced down to toil. Belonging all his life to the genteel class, known, since he came to manhood as a worker with the brain, he was now reduced, degraded to the ranks of the horny-handed. Upon a man of "the working classes" the clothes he wore would have been only the ordinary garments of toil. But upon him they were Garments of Failure!

As though to cry "Hear, hear!" to the truth of it, figures in the window, scarcely seen before, now caught his eye. For the place was a clothing store, and several carefully dressed models were grouped about his image in the glass. Something in their fixed poise, their vapid, complacent satisfaction, brought a rebellious anger to the man who gazed in the window. He saw them as symbols, almost incarnate, of that seamy side of the world he had loved to which his idealisms had hitherto blinded him. And they stood there, shattering his illusions, rubbing the scales from his eyes.

For three years he had striven and suffered as few or none of these smug people of the city had striven or suffered. And the dignity of that clean striving rose in him and raged, and clenched his hand for him in the sudden purpose of a new strife!

A sudden purpose, but an inevitable one. For the issue was clear. Was the idea of success of these manikins—the success of the wealth in his pockets, which none of them would suspect—to rule in his world, or was it to be the success of clean striving? None knew better than Bill Branchfield, the prospector of the Mayo, how fortuitous may be the success of the pocket, and how little in the scales of justice the lucky strike would weigh when balanced against the patient, enduring, pure-purposed efforts he had made for years—mainly for the sake of Mary and the little ones—yes, and for his friends, too.

Mary and his friends. And at that a thought as bitter as death assailed him. She, too, had spoken—God, how often—of *success!*

The man scarred by prodigious struggle, worn as gaunt within as without, was stripped to the bone of all but the greater issues. There was no solace to him in the thousands in his pockets or in that vaster wealth of which these drafts were but the crumbs. Life huddled with manikins and their aping women would be intolerable to him, a thing worse than death. Surely, they were not all alike, surely——

He would know, *he swore to know!* Clothes? Here were clothes. He had but to step into this doorway and in five minutes—— *And then he would never know!* To do that would be to throw away the key he now possessed by which he might search the souls of his fellow men in this estranged world to which he had returned a seeming pauper.

Grimly he turned away from the clothing store, his chin up, his jaw set.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HENDERSON'S WELCOME.

It was nearly noon and hot when Branchfield turned into Washington Street. Down that thronged and buzzing thoroughfare, familiar and yet strange to him, the alien boldly walked, beads of perspiration on his forehead.

It was not the heat alone, trying as that was to the man from the Arctic Circle, that brought and kept the moisture on his brow. It was an unformulated terror. The reception he was to get from his fellows, threateningly foreshadowed by the experiences of the morning, was a matter of concern, indeed, to a being so pathetically social as Branchfield. But a tenderer and more vital anxiety was leaping over the next few hours, making him almost glad that Washington Street and his grim business there must intervene between him and his hearth. Harsh and

grinding though those hours might prove, they would be a buffer nevertheless for his coward heart, staving off that inevitable moment when he must face Mary's affirmation or denial of the hideous philosophy of money success.

From unconsciousness of clothes he had now become morbidly conscious of them—of his own, of those of others, of clothes in themselves. Like Carlyle, the pain of the world in his rugged face, he drew subtle and fantastic meanings from them ceaselessly, as he breasted the busy stream, looking to right and left only enough to recognize whoever should recognize him, and to spot the man or woman who might pretend to fail to recognize him.

Two blocks of the heart of the town he walked in this way without encountering either an intimate friend or an acquaintance whom he could be sure knew him. But many that he knew—several of them by name—hurried by him and—was it his imagination alone that gave them so brisk a pace, such unseeing eyes? And yet eyes that seemed to hold in their varied expressions a furtive something that so gnawed Branchfield that he was glad when the spacious front of the Mammoth Store loomed upon him across the street. He was glad because here there could be no skulking. Man to man, or man to rat, the encounters would be direct and forthright. He stalked through the revolving door and walked boldly down the main aisle.

He was met by a suave floorwalker, Stevens, an old employee with a post the most prominent of its kind in the establishment.

"Can I direct you to any particular——" The floorwalker paused, recognizing Branchfield, formerly of the main office force. Hundreds of people—old faces and new—passed hourly under the sure appraisement of his eyes, and were subject for a moment to his discriminative handling. He symbolized, Bill knew, the attitude of business to the citizen unit.

"Oh, Branchfield," said the floorwalker, as coolly as if it were but yesterday he had seen him last, and looking neither at Bill's person with the slightest curiosity nor at his face with the slightest interest. He had taken in both at a glance as Branchfield emerged from the revolving door. His manner, neither friendly nor unfriendly, was simply nothing—a swift, though unhurried nothing! His attention already on another person, an obsequious smile on his smooth, plump face, he turned from Bill with the words:

"You know the aisles, of course."

Branchfield walked on, out of the way, a few feet, and then turned and looked at the person whom Stevens was smirkingly directing. She was a tightly gowned, carefully prepared lady, dressed in what might have been called, in contrast to Bill's clothing, garments of success. Turning away in disgust, Branchfield mounted the broad stairway.

Its business of distinguishing between the successes and the failures, actual and soon to be, having long ago required it, the credit department had moved across the corridor and taken a second room for the exclusive use of the manager and his assistant.

The former was now expatiating on a pet subject—the rapid changes in the fortunes of firms and individuals; the need, the vital need, of the up-to-date credit man to take no rating for granted longer than the time it would take the ink—printer's or writing fluid—to dry upon the page. It was a point strictly pertinent to the matter in hand just now; for his visitor was F. H. Anthony, head of the Credit Men's Association of Seattle, with certain policies in the making.

"We are living," said Henderson impressively, "in strenuous times, in a rapidly developing section of the country. And I contend that rapid fluctuations always accompany such conditions. It is the duty, then, of the watchdogs of the ledger——"

He turned impatiently to a clerk who had entered and put out his hand for the expected card.

"He didn't give me any card, Mr. Henderson," said the clerk.

"What name?"

"He told me just to say an old friend that you'll be glad to see."

Henderson's curiosity prevented his noticing the faint smile with which the clerk had delivered the message. Also, he had in mind a certain friend who was quite likely to drop in upon him at this time to take him to luncheon, and who was just the sort of person with whom he'd like Anthony to see him fraternize. So he said with simulated reluctance: "Let him come in."

At the same time he turned apologetically to Anthony: "You don't mind, do you? I'll get rid of him in just a moment."

"It's all right, my dear fellow."

Henderson rose and went to the door. He was still the elegant Henderson of three years before—or rather more so. He still smoked expensive cigars, but even more frequently. The room was furnished in mahogany with Oriental rugs to tone with the wood. Into this elegant office the uncouth figure of Branchfield came and closed the door behind him with his left hand. His right he extended to his former chief. His face was almost impassive.

Henderson checked his advance before getting within handshaking distance of his visitor and stared in astonishment at the face before him. Many times each day for a term of years he had looked into that face, and though it was much changed he knew it instantly as the face of Bill Branchfield. But the body! Instantly Henderson's mind attempted classification of it. It was the robust, powerful body of—a section hand? Or of one of a threshing crew? Hardly of a mechanic: they were not so coarsely dressed.

Coarsely dressed! This body was not coarsely dressed. Its clothes were coarse, yes; but to call it "dressed" was hardly the way to put it, Henderson thought with disgust.

He glanced again at Bill's face which was paler now. No, no sunny field of Washington would have spared it thus. The man hadn't worked lately—had been ill, perhaps—as the down and outers always have been, or say they have been.

These thoughts were the lightning accompaniment of the inspection. They were mentally automatic; beyond control of Henderson, who was humiliated to the core, feeling the eyes of Anthony on him and his "old friend." The pause, with Henderson's reluctant hand barely raised, had been brief, but long enough to bring all the color of a harvest hand to the face almost pallid a moment before.

"I'll introduce myself—it seems necessary," said the intruder. "I'm William Branchfield, your former——"

At which Henderson choked him off by taking his hand and slightly turning with him so that Henderson's own back should shield his disreputable caller from Anthony's view. At the same time he gently pushed Bill toward an adjacent door which led to the outer corridor.

"For the Lord's sake," he said with emotion, "why do you butt in here looking like that!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A CASE IN POINT.

They were in the corridor now, the door was closed again, and Henderson's back was against it. When the extruding process was complete he had withdrawn his hand from Branchfield's and had thrust it into his pocket. Branchfield, icily cold again after the uncontrollable flush of feeling that had swept him, thought Henderson was going to fish out some small change—wildly improbable unless he had quite changed his nature!

The slumbering giant of resistance which that third day of July was slowly rousing in Branchfield made him deliberate. With a slight backward step to match the ill-concealed disdain of the credit manager, he took up the latter's words:

"Looking like this? My clothes you mean. Are they dirty?"

"No, not that; I merely mean——"

"I'm a miner," said Bill, "and the clothes are perfectly suited to the work. It has been hard work, and the clothes perhaps show it. But why you think——"

"I simply meant that——"

"But why you think the Lord's interest is involved by my appearance here—here in my old office, greeting my old friend who assured me he'd be glad to see me back, whether I succeeded or failed? I'm curious to know why you drag God into a simple thing like this."

In the privacy of the corridor Henderson felt he could unbend a little toward the wreck of the man whose convenient loans to him had rarely been repaid. Besides, Bill was—or at least had been—a good scout, and a capable assistant. So he smiled soothingly.

"Nothing personal—er—Bill, I assure you. And personally, of course, I understand where you were—or where you went, at least! But others, you understand, who don't know might. You'll get the point, won't you, and not feel that personally I am——"

"You sputter, Henderson—and explain nothing. You *have* no explanation that you have the nerve to give me. Though you needn't be afraid—not of me—to tell the truth—the truth, that in the presence of your associates, like that man in there, you'd prefer not to be claimed as a friend by a man who looks like a laboring man, who is apt to seek a loan——"

"Which I'd gladly give you—er—Bill, I assure you, for I'm certainly sorry for you, if it were not for a number of circumstances which I haven't the time to explain, but which——"

"No," interrupted the other, unable, even in his misery, to suppress a reminiscent smile, "the loans *were* usually the other way, weren't they?"

"Sarcasm, I suppose, Branchfield," interjected Henderson a little acridly. "And neither becoming nor, I should say, in your altered condition, politic."

"Politic be damned," said Branchfield calmly, "I'll leave that for time-serving ingrates like you. And as to your sorrow for me—oh, yes, you look it!"

He stepped close to Henderson and held him with his eye. Henderson was as expressionless as a frog.

"Your real attitude—why you take the trouble to sputter lies about it, when you'd save time—yes, and some shreds of self-respect—by slamming the door in the face of the down-and-out friend—wrestle with that problem yourself. Sleep with it to-night, if you can. But"—his eye narrowed, he raised his finger and laughed a light, sardonic laugh: "Don't talk about being sorry for me. Even you could almost insult me that way. Let me bear the sorrow—and pity. You need it more than I do."

He turned on his heel and walked away.

Henderson, the frog look still in his face, stood with his hand on the doorknob recovering his composure. Before he reëntered the room he felt that his expression had assumed just that tinge of melancholy regret which comported with the philosophic vein in which he proposed to treat the incident.

"I regret the interruption," he apologized, "yet, singularly enough, it's a case rather in point—apropos, you know, of what we had just been speaking of, the rapid fluctuations in the financial circumstances of individuals."

He had resumed his office chair, and was passing a pencil smoothly through his fingers, setting it first upon its head, then upon its point on his polished desk.

"That man," he said impressively, "was at one time no less a person than my assistant—here, in this office. Nothing brilliant about him, but solid, capable, reliable—a plodder. He would have risen slowly, but he wanted to get rich quick—threw up his job and went on one of those fool gold stampedes. Never heard of him since till he butts in here in that rig. 'Down and out' he calls himself, and you can imagine that he's right when he couldn't scrape up a few dollars to buy a cheap hand-me-down suit for the sake of appearances when he comes whining around for his old job again. And because he saw I regarded his appearance as, in a sense, unseemly, he got angry—actually impertinent. Three short years! Talk about fluctuations in credit! But to return to the question——"

And Henderson ceased inverting the fortunes of the hexagon pencil and took up a list of proposed members of the State Mercantile Protective League.

CHAPTER XX.

CIRCUMSTANCES ALTER BANKERS.

The day before a holiday, especially a summer holiday, is usually a busy one in a bank. And the First National, of Centerville, was certainly no exception in this respect, especially at two o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr. James Chisholm, its elderly though energetic president and manager, hoped to catch the three-o'clock suburban train to his country place at Ashmead. He was dictating replies to some letters which were gathered under his left hand, while his right was busy signing a pile of vouchers. A uniformed messenger entered.

"Mr. Branchfield, Mr. Chisholm—Mr. William Branchfield."

He did not at first remember William Branchfield, but in a moment the old familiar name of "Lemuel Branchfield" recalled the fact that the son had had brief relations with the bank not so very long ago. This must be the man. He had gone to the coast—no, to Alaska, merchandising, mining, or something. He was Bookkeeper Stickton's friend.

True to the lifelong habit of the banker, he must tabulate his visitor before calling him in. He had done so and the result was dubious. At two o'clock of this busy day it was positively irritating. An errand of no consequence, without doubt; some mere trivial matter, and the man too ignorant to be aware that the cashier could attend to him. And yet the rule of the cautious and enterprising banker asserted itself: A man from a distance must be welcomed—not from civic hospitality, but because such men

often bring business, directly or indirectly—information, unexpected connections of possible consequence, new enterprises. These were the merest possibilities in this case, but a rule is a rule, and — —

"Show him in. Return presently, Miss Landragan."

Chisholm had been a climber of thirty when Lemuel Branchfield was a comfortably situated and somewhat influential man of fifty. For twenty years they had had frequent, and at times close, association, and not by any means to the disadvantage of Chisholm. But of this Chisholm at this moment recalled nothing. He did remember, however, that the son's face had strongly reminded him of the father's. He saw the resemblance again as Branchfield, discreetly shadowed by the bank's plain-clothes man, swung into the president's private office. But from Branchfield's face Chisholm's glance shifted instantly to his entire person, giving it a practiced once over and returning to the face. He rose perfunctorily and held out a limp hand, smiled a metallic smile, and said with little inflection:

"Mr. Branchfield?"

"Why—yes," replied Bill, his own pale smile—habit of a lifetime—flickering out as he spoke. He paused. The bank president's whole air produced the effect of a pause measured by the menacing tick of a large clock on the paneled wall. Bill swallowed twice and then lifted his head.

"You said you'd be glad to see me back."

"I am," replied Chisholm colorlessly. "Very." Unlike Henderson he made no explanations that explained nothing, being several degrees more finished in the art of destroying the enemy's spiritual flotilla without leaving a trace. "But," he continued, "as this is a very busy day, kindly say what I can do for you."

Bill's impulse was to turn and go. But he remembered that there *was* something the bank could do for him. For in these hours of nerve-racking strife with the monster he had sworn to face he felt he might be slipping, and feared disaster. And this premonition of impending ill—he knew not what—had whispered to him to empty his pockets of their valuable contents. Here was the place to do it. Without a word he drew an old leather case from his breast pocket. Chisholm watched him with impatience.

He peeled from the thick packet yellow-backed treasury notes, one after another, silently counting them as they slipped from his fingers to the rosewood table. Then he laid the pokes of nuggets beside them, and finally handed the banker an envelope containing the drafts. Chisholm was already surprised, but when he saw the figures on the drafts he was astonished.

"Why, what's all this?" he asked in a distinctly altered tone, and glancing no longer at the clock.

"Spring crop from one corner of one of my Alaska claims," said Branchfield quietly. Without intending it, his answer had fallen into character with the return of a Monte Cristo.

"Indeed?" said Chisholm politely with raised eyebrows. He opened a note which the thoughtful Alaskan bank manager had inserted in the envelope, addressed to their correspondent in Centerville—which happened to be the First National Bank. "Your banker in Borealis must think rather highly of those claims, for he does a very unusual thing. He authorizes us to honor any drafts you may draw on him between now and next spring, up to an extremely heavy limit."

Bill did not know this, having supposed the note only some sort of identification. But he gave no sign of surprise. He turned to the banker, who was now all courteous attention.

"I asked to see you really just to greet you, and receive your greetings, personally, but since you ask me what you can do for me—here it is, though doubtless your receiving teller could have handled this for me quite as well. I'd like to deposit these funds—temporarily, mind you. As for the greetings, we will consider them superfluous."

"Not in the least, my dear fellow," protested Chisholm, the protective asbestos curtain with which he had shrouded his really charming personality now completely drawn aside. He extended his hand. "I certainly want to congratulate you on your well-merited success."

But Branchfield remained stoical.

"I need your receipt, Mr. Chisholm, not your hand," he replied.

"As you will, Branchfield," returned Chisholm, wincing. After an awkward pause he asked with a trace of asperity: "Why do you dress like that?" He felt that he had been deliberately trapped—cheated by a sort of costumery.

Again Branchfield, rather than demean himself by an explantion, answered the spirit rather than the letter of the inquiry.

"They are just a miner's clothes. But they turn a wonderful searchlight upon the hearts of my friends."

Chisholm averted the edge of the retort by turning to his desk to press a button. When the teller appeared, the banker directed him to receive and receipt for what funds "Mr. Branchfield" should give him. Bill repocketed some of the currency and the little sacks of nuggets. The rest of his wealth he turned over to the teller.

Chisholm had now somewhat regained his countenance and decided on his tactics. For Branchfield was obviously a client of great potential importance, and it was by no means the first time in the banker's long career that he had pocketed his pride in the interest of expediency. He adopted a defensive tone of mild expostulation.

"It's rather unfair, Branchfield, downright unfair, I think, to create this false impression. We are all human, you know, and it is not unnatural, as you must admit yourself, for one to make an error in—— You are a man of the world and understand——"

"Yes, I understand—too well!" Bill assured him with a bitterness of feeling that threatened his mask of impassivity.

Chisholm smiled urbanely and raised a deprecating hand.

"We can't look beyond externals at once—not at once. A man's appearance counts for much. It has to at first. I was busy and harrassed, but later on, naturally I would have—— Why, if only for your father's sake——"

"Stop," warned Branchfield with a rising fury. For Chisholm to speak of Bill's father was almost to desecrate his grave. To the overwrought man it was as though this creature of a sordid world would lay profaning hands upon the only sanctuary there seemed left him—the holy of holies of his boyhood memories.

"Don't take the name of my father—don't dare." It was with difficulty that he mastered his anger.

"No use," he continued a moment later in an altered voice. "You can't smooth it over. I'm not a fool—not that kind of a fool. Be done, please, with insincerity. You were honester—kinder, even—when I entered the room and you insulted me with your eyes and the very tone of your voice. You simply insult me again when you try to wriggle out of it. So let me take my receipts and go."

Chisholm was quite speechless with anger and chagrin, and Branchfield turned away and left him.

At one of the windows down the line he inquired, for the second time, for Mr. Stickton; only to be told that the bookkeeper had been sent to Seattle and would hardly return before closing time. That seemed to remind Bill of something, and he obtained a small pocket check book. Then he left the bank.

The plain-clothes man, meanwhile, had lost all interest in him. He probably thought him some cattleman who had cashed in.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FURY OF A PATIENT MAN.

It was a remembered purpose that had caused Branchfield to secure the check book. He had resolutely crowded his domestic affairs into the background of his mind, fearing more and more to face their possibilities as the iron of distrust pierced him deeper and deeper with each succeeding revelation. But he could not forget that the day was the third of July, the last day of grace for the little home on Poplar Street. The amount due on the mortgage was a pitiful sum to him now, yet how formidable, how colossal, it must have bulked to Mary.

As he left the bank he paused a moment on the sidewalk, sniffing the cooling, tainted air of the hateful little city. The Saturday-afternoon crowd swirled and eddied about him—him and his misery no more to them than to the insensate walls of stone against which he measured his six feet of weary, unfed body. But he thrust up his head once more and turned into the entryway of "Amos Fiske & Co., Loans and Investments."

Three clerks now were busy in the office of the man who dealt in money—and other things. For Fiske, too, had prospered; or, since he had always prospered, it was rather to be deduced that the number of his transactions had considerably increased. He, himself, was out, but would return presently. The young woman stenographer indicated a chair in which he might wait, and hesitated whether to take the trouble to cross the room to bring him the afternoon paper. But roughly dressed men were not infre-

quent callers at the money lender's, and the girl had learned to show a kind of courtesy to them. So she gave Bill the paper; but he only held it in his hand and studied the wall.

It was his first pause and wait since he had left the steamer, and as he sat there staring at the wall he felt again, rising in him like a cud to be chewed over, the contumelies that had been crammed down his throat during every hour of that day. Thus it was that when Fiske returned and greeted him in the cautious way he now knew so well, Branchfield was still under the momentum of his resolution to play his rôle to the bitter end; was still the failure his clothing proclaimed him; still the fellow who, broken on the wheel of fortune, mutely asked of the prosperous.

"You remember me, then—Branchfield?" Neither offered to shake hands.

"Yes, of course," said Fiske. "We did a little business together three or four years ago." Bill followed him to his desk, took a chair near to Fiske, and spoke to him fairly.

"I have just returned from Alaska. My wife wrote me that the mortgage was extended."

"Yes, we were very easy with Mrs. Branchfield."

"But she said you refused to extend it again, though I understand she paid the interest."

Fiske did not like the man's tone, but he was patient in converse. One who for money deals often with those who are cowed and stupefied by misfortune perforce cultivates patience.

"The interest has been paid, as you say," explained Fiske, "though not always promptly. In fact, far from it—of late. But while the interest has been paid you understand, don't you, that a mortgage can't run on forever? Improvements depreciate, especially frame dwellings, and—there are many other reasons. Interest can be raised, but there is a legal limit to that remedy."

"You raised the rate of interest?"

"Of course, when the extension was granted."

"Wasn't it high enough already?" asked Bill, frowning.

"Rates increased in this class of investments. You can learn that from anybody who is informed—any one at all." He had become a little testy.

"The fact is we treated your wife very well—very indulgently. But there are limits, as I say."

"You were well secured," asserted Branchfield. Fiske might have seen the flushed face gradually paling and read its significance. "And the woman was alone, struggling with two little children."

"That was why we were indulgent—very indulgent. But finally business becomes business—when patience ceases to be a virtue."

"Your interest was paid and you were well secured," repeated Branchfield doggedly. "You are still well secured." He could not, for the life of him, follow the easiest path and take out his check book. For he was like a sleeper that acts a part—the part of a man worn by a toilsome quest, spent, broken, shabby, penniless. And in his bigness of soul he took vicariously the slings and arrows rained upon this forlorn and naked tribe. And so, in the somnambulism of an abject poverty he could but repeat: "You are well secured: another extension for a little while couldn't hurt you."

"That is impossible now," refused Fiske decisively. His manner seemed to say that he observed nothing in the man who leaned eagerly forward in his chair that augured well for payment, or that justified further courtesies of speech.

Beware the fury of a patient man! So warned the poet Dryden. And Bill, for hours on end, without sustenance, had been patient. Red rebellion now surged up in him as he realized that the picture was complete, that the fate of the failure was sealed in that false and cruel "Impossible!" He saw Marys—vistas of them and their spindling broods—driven from their shelter. So he took by the throat the drivers of them, incarnate in Fiske, symbol of the money they thought he lacked. Leaning forward, he wound the great sinews of his fingers about the neck of the money lender.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST STRAW.

"And so you'd fling them in the street, would you!" Bill groaned. Himself so humane a man, it was sickening, the cruelty he felt himself inflicting upon this throbbing flesh. But a great fury against soulless wrong beat through him to his finger tips, making them fangs.

The clerks rushed up—and halted, unable—such was the look of Branchfield—even to cry for help. But Fiske, who, after his kind, knew the weaknesses more perfectly than the strengths of men, crouched motionless, and so obtained his liberation, for Branchfield would rather have died himself than strangle an unresisting creature. He released Fiske's head and let his arms fell to his sides again.

"You are too miserable to kill," growled Bill, his fury gradually turning to cold disgust. The other man, his own hand now at his swelling throat, eyed his assailant with cautious hate, his brain busy at the coining of some swift revenge.

"But I'll say this," continued Bill implacably. "You'll wait. For you *are* well secured. You'll do the 'impossible.' You'll wait, and you'll tell me you'll wait now—right now." Though he had called a truce to present violence, there still lay in his tones and manner a compelling menace.

Fiske rose and nervously paced the room. The other occupants had resumed their places and pretended to be at work, oblivious of this aftermath.

The money lender came at length to a halt in his pacing and broke the silence.

"It was the truth—it *is* impossible. Now let me speak, please. Forget for a moment that you are just out of a lawless wilderness. You misunderstood. It is impossible for the simple reason that the mortgage has passed out of my hands. I could put you behind the bars for this brutal attack."

He could see that Branchfield was getting himself more in hand, and by watching him every moment he could tell just how far it was safe to go. By a great effort he was now able to feign magnanimity.

"I suppose I ought to make allowances for your condition of mind. Your situation is desperate and your nerves are shattered. It's some excuse for you, maybe."

"The mortgage, you say—come, come," Branchfield tapped impatiently.

"As I say, has passed out of my hands."

"How? What do you mean?"

"The transaction was, in a sense, confidential. But since you've seen fit to—attack me over it, I shall tell you the truth."

He came close to Branchfield, and said, with low-voiced reluctance: "The mortgage was secretly bought only a little time ago by your friend—your *friend*, Tom Stickton."

Fiske noted with satisfaction the growing bewilderment of the miner.

"Bought?" echoed Branchfield. "Paid off, do you mean?"

"No," replied Fiske with careful emphasis, "I mean exactly what I say—*bought* secretly. No one, especially Mrs. Branchfield, was to know of it. For a—er—small additional consideration I agreed to let Mrs. Branchfield continue to believe I held the mortgage."

"But I understood you were going to force her to quit the premises promptly."

"That was before Stickton's deal with me. Since then I have done nothing. My instructions were to do nothing."

Branchfield was looking at the floor, his hands on his knees, tapping his faded overalls—floundering, Fiske knew, in a fog of doubt and vague distrust.

"You were to say nothing to my wife; but how about me? I own the place and gave the mortgage."

"Nothing was said of you. Nothing had been heard of you for a year or two. No doubt he supposed you were dead."

"He—supposed me dead—and bought the mortgage secretly. He had money to pay it off, but he——"

"But he did *not* pay it. He merely bought it."

"He merely bought it," Bill again repeated turbidly. "Why? Why should——"

Fiske moved closer. He spoke still lower, using his eyes on Branchfield's clouded face as a doctor uses his fingers on a sick man's pulse.

"His motive? Well, I confess it puzzled me at first, till I remembered—or was it some one mentioned it—that formerly, before Mrs. Branchfield was your wife, Stickton used to be—well, rather attentive to her, wasn't he?"

Branchfield, on his feet, flashed a piercing glance at Fiske. But Fiske's face was clear, almost amiable. He had spoken only of Stickton, insinuated nothing as to Mary, Bill realized. He sat down again, saying:

"Go carefully, Mr. Money Lender."

Fiske's eyes snapped viciously—at the window. He knew unerringly when his face was unsafe to be seen by this violent man.

"I am careful: I am known to be a careful man," he affirmed. "The circumstances certainly imply no—er—disloyalty on Mrs. Branchfield's part. Quite the contrary, or there would be no motive, no necessity, for

Stickton to secure an advantage by covertly buying this mortgage and using it as a whip over the head of the woman whom, if rumor is not mistaken, he had formerly wooed without success."

Branchfield went toward Fiske swiftly, under resurging passion. Fiske alertly backed toward the drawer of his desk, determined to shoot the man dead rather than take a second chance of being strangled. He mistook, however, the purpose of the miner.

"Quick," said Branchfield, "your proof. Show me that he bought it—that it was an assignment of the mortgage, not a satisfaction of it."

Fiske regained his composure at once.

"An assignment naturally is given the purchaser, like any other transfer. But fortunately it is my habit to execute such documents in duplicate. Er—Miss Kellogg, get me the file of the Branchfield loan."

He ran the papers through expertly, and handed the carbon copy of the assignment to the man who stood over him, almost trembling. It was a simple transfer of the mortgage, the consideration being the full face value of the mortgage. After his quick glance at it, Branchfield, without asking Fiske's permission, thrust the document in his pocket and fled. If Fiske spoke again he did not know it. He saw nothing, heard nothing as he stumbled down the stairs, except a kind of falsetto humming in the ears of his brain. Outside, a slight breeze made him shiver, for he had sweated in the office of the money lender.

He moved a little way along the stone front of the bank building and stood with his back starkly against it, looking out, over the heads of the passers-by, at the street. The newsboys were raucously crying their papers, but he did not know it. Late afternoon had brought to the air, even of Washington Street, the sweetness of wind-wafted harvestings; but he was unconscious of the air.

Back to his native land, but an alien; returned from the wilderness, yet an exile! From chill Arctic wastes he had come back, only to shiver at every touch of his old-time fellows, at every contact of his old-time life.

If he could have counted on emerging from this horror in rose-embowered Poplar Street he could have gone on. Stabbed by his friends, he might have found healing in his home. But that hope was gone. He had courted the vitriol that should cleanse him of illusion, and illusion had fallen from him like a garment. In the glare of revelation he could now see clearly what that success had meant of which Mary had so often spoken and written—for which she had even prayed and taught their child to pray. In her early discontents, in her letting him go North so readily, down to the last frank prayer of her letters, well had she proved the kinship of her instincts with those of the Mammon-worshipers whose masks he had torn away.

After all, fate had been kind in letting others, and not Mary, madden him. For he was mad—he felt it. He could go out of this world—out of all but the North of it—out of mortal life, even, at least not hating her, as he hated the rest of his kind.

But first he had a reckoning to make. The Grahams and the Hendersons, the Chisholms and the Fiskes, he could let go. He had withered them with his scorn, even as they had withered every beautiful, growing thing within him. To them he could cry quits. But with Stickton, the false friend, to whom he had given of the scant proceeds of his mortgaged home; with Stickton, who had hoped him dead that he might lash his widow with the sting of want, with the threat of the streets, till she came to him—with him there must first be reckoning!

God, he had loved him—loved him! Like a brother. This was the crowning anguish. This last most acrid draft that he was drinking was indeed the vitriol that had cleansed him of illusion.

Men stand upon a shore, and the living waters ebb and flow. They had ebbed about the feet of Branchfield of the brotherhood—they had ebbed far, leaving him stranded.

Now the tide turned, and—slowly at first—the living waters flowed again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHARITY.

He felt a small hand fumbling—feeling for his. Hardly conscious of it, but instinctively responsive to any gentleness of touch, he opened his hand and felt something thrust into it.

"Hey, big feller," said a hoarse little voice, trying to whisper, "here's somethin' for youse."

He looked down. A newsboy was at his side. A second boy stood off a little way gravely contemplating the disconsolate figure against the naked stone of the money temple. They had eyed him for many minutes from the curb, till one had said:

"It's him, surest thing you know. It's the guy that always took a paper anyhow —and sometimes two."

"I b'lieve you're right, Chimmie, at dat. It's him sure, th' easy mark. Chee, ain't he down and out?"

"The poor old stiff!" agreed the other boy.

Then had followed more words and a rapid investigation of resources; they had gone deep into their pockets.

Bill brought up his cupped hand and looked into it. It was half full of pennies, among which glittered several silver coins. He looked at the boy—at the other boy. They were taller than the lads in his memory picture of this corner, but they were very little chaps still, and in his overwrought condition their tribute touched him to tears. He had found friends at last!

The little boys were awed at the sight of the slow-falling drops from the half-closed, downcast eyes of the unmoving man. In that emotion they felt that a great thankfulness was told to them, and they were quite satisfied, and moved nearer to the corner to cry their papers again.

Branchfield's black thoughts had lightened a little at the feel of the child's hand and the sympathy of his hoarse little whisper. It diverted him, making him consider what he should do with the gift. He decided to retain it. Pocketing the humble coins, he drew his wallet, took from it two twenty-dollar bills, which he crushed separately in his hands, and walked to the corner. As he passed the newsboys he thrust into each of their necks a crumpled bill, and went up the cross street in the wake of the familiar old trolley, in the direction of the little park which was faced by the decayed mansion of the Sticktons.

By a common impulse, each of the newsies raised his free hand, fumbled in his neck, uncrumpled the bill, and stared at it. And by another impulse—or a continuation of the first—each hissed "Chee," and goggled at the retreating figure of the big mournful man. It was the dumfoundingest thing of their young lives.

The brain of that retreating man, stunned since it left the place of loans and investments, was rousing itself to great activity. And it had chosen for its possessor a long walk in the gathering dusk, instead of a short ride. Such safeguards against the excesses of emotion spring from unerring primal instincts of self-preservation, and control us in times of dire need. Dark passion gripped him, and he wrestled with it, block after block.

Every word of Mary's letters that referred, even remotely, to Tom or what Tom had meant in the life of the little family during those three years, rose out of their pages and interpreted themselves in the light of Fiske's astounding revelation—of which the proof was in his pocket. But since the time of Stickton's ceasing his visits—through her fault, as she had intimated with suspicious generosity—she had said little of Stickton. Little directly; but in Branchfield's state of mind this negative evidence was of a most damning kind. On the whole it was clear—too clear! Stickton was a one-woman man, just as Branchfield himself was. A steadfast, brooding fellow, hardly modern in his make-up, the isolation of the woman and the remoteness of the husband—his probable death, even—had been too much for the man of one idea. Yes, of one idea. One idea in his vocation —accounting; one in his avocation—the ledger-posting machine; one in his emotional life—Mary Branchfield! And all for self! Like Graham and Henderson and the rest—all for self and its baser cravings. And yet——

His hand, thrust deep in his Mackinaw coat, had encountered the coins of the newsboys, and their touch electrified him.

"Beautiful," he breathed, "beautiful little brothers." And the thought came to him like an easing breath to stifling lungs of the kinship of these boys with the common race of men. He passed his hand across his forehead, and found it cold with the perspiration of approaching nerve exhaustion.

The little park being near, he dragged on, entered its curving paths, lurched against a green bench, and sagged down into it sidewise—almost sitting upon his revolver—and buried his face in his hands.

"'To be or not to be!'" The soliloquy of his favorite—Hamlet, sorrowing victim of a greater perfidy, slipped fluently through his mind.

"'Or to take arms against a sea of trou-

bles,'" He felt *his* "arms," almost under him—arms more powerful than the tragic Dane had ever imagined. "'And by opposing——'" What? Himself? Stickton?

CHAPTER XXIV.

COOLING WATERS.

A short distance back of Branchfield, a man somewhat younger than himself, had been nervously pacing up and down the silent grass. At first he was too absorbed in an anguish of his own to give much heed to the roughly clad figure upon the bench, stooped over, staring at the ground. But later, Bill raised his head and took to gazing through the aura of the near-by arc light, and thus illumined, his ghastly face was clearly limned to the restless youth in the shadowy grass.

"Branchfield; big-hearted Bill Branchfield," he said to himself, "down and out—and worse!"

Forgetting his own troubles, he found himself speculating upon the troubles of another; and soon he went over to the bench and lightly slapped Branchfield upon the shoulder.

The man he knew to have been one of the most genial of fellows turned upon him a forbidding countenance. Heightened by the garb he wore its effect was almost saturnine. The youth feared the man might strike him. But he summoned his courage.

"Hullo, Bill, old man," he said in a quiet, cordial, chummy way. Branchfield listlessly observed him.

"I don't know you, young man," he returned with apathy, "though I think I know your face. But you're dressed all right, and you're probably a clerk of some kind, climbing up."

The young fellow, who was plain-minded and not overbright, became very uncomfortable. Branchfield's speech was slow, but it was curiously strained—there was a woeful bitterness of sarcasm in it: he seemed to speak not to one but to many.

"I advise you to look me over more carefully before you call me 'old man.' Consider my clothes and my hands. I have toiled. I am evidently broke, perhaps even hungry. No good can come to you from contact with so fallen a creature. Even to recognize him lowers you in the scale. It associates you with failure—failure, the one unpardonable sin!"

"Oh, cut it, Bill," said the young man, plucking up. And he added falsely: "I haven't hardly noticed your clothes."

"But why do you notice me at all?" asked Branchfield curtly, looking the lad closely in the face.

"Why, merely because—no harm, I hope—— You see I knew you once slightly and—excuse me—but you seemed kind of in trouble, some way. And I myself——"

"You yourself——" encouraged Bill. For it entered his mind to gain temporary surcease of the gnawing within by listening to the confession of another during his wait for Stickton, in whose house no light yet appeared.

"Yes, I'm in trouble myself," admitted the youth. "Terrible, terrible trouble. And I could tell it to you—or I could of. But you seem kind of different than you were."

"Different? Yes. But tell me if you can." He saw the young man was white-faced and thin.

"Oh, I guess there's nothing particu'ly strange about it; or particu'ly interesting for that matter. But we've just been married, my little wife and me, hardly a year. She used to work in the store, and she always had a cold. And I was doing pretty well, and we thought if she could just do a little housework instead, and putter in the garden in the sun, and sing, she'd be all right. And so we got married, but we couldn't get only upstairs rooms; and it was cold, and she seemed to get worse. Today I told her to send for Doctor Clark, the specialist."

"Ill health," thought Bill. "That would be a bad combination with shabby clothes. How could a feeble person live through the disdain and contempt?"

"I've just been home and found the doctor's note. I told him over the phone to tell me the truth, and I guess he hated to, but he did. But he left it with a neighbor, so's my wife wouldn't know. It says a year in a good sanitarium in a dry climate is what she should have. Otherwise—otherwise——"

The youth cleared his throat, afraid of his voice.

"To prepare for the worst, was what it said." That was all he could manage. After a few moments he made a sound between a snicker and a sob: "What chance? Just none. A year in a sanitarium! What chance?"

After a long silence the young man stood up and felt in his pockets—for a cigarette, Bill thought, but he was mistaken. The youth fished out a coin and pressed it into Branchfield's hand."

"What's this, pardner?" asked the elder man. Something in the comradely manner of their being together made him speak as he would have spoken in the North.

"Why, it's what I owe you."

"What's that? What you owe me!"

"That's right. You don't remember me, Mr. Branchfield, which isn't strange, because you only knew me slightly. And I've grown to look different in the last few years—grown up, you know, and working hard and in trouble. You gave me one just this size. You slipped it into my pocket the night I was fired from the Mammoth Store. Do you remember it now?"

"I have a hazy recollection of something of that sort," admitted Branchfield after pondering a moment. "But you need it more than I, perhaps. You'll never in your life need money more."

"What good would five dollars do me!" cried the boy, pounding his fist in rebellious passion. "She's got to die, like a—like a poor little dog. Not five dollars nor ten nor ten times ten would begin to do us any good." He glared at the ground, at the pebbles at his feet, distinct in the glare of the electrolier, as though each was a coin and impotent to avert this supreme tragedy.

"But you—that's different. Even if I didn't owe it to you, which I do and more, for what you did for me that night. Say, Bill, that braced me up. Say! It made me know everybody in that place wasn't alike." He now sunk his voice coaxingly, yet he tried to speak very respectfullly: "You can get something to eat and a place to sleep. The park here gets mighty chilly before morning. I tried it once or twice m'self after you left," he added, confidentially. "Now, Bill, please; yes, please. I'm glad and Em, she'll be glad, too. I've got my job, and this here ain't a drop in the bucket to what we need."

Once more Branchfield's hand tightened over a coin that was as precious to him as drops of moisture to the parched or as manna to the Israelite host. Like the pennies of the newsboys, it was pitiful money, but hard-earned and not bare of the giver! And he felt again the tides of hope come creeping back over dreary sands.

The sound of light footsteps struck sharply upon Branchfield's answering memory, and he knew that Stickton was coming from the car, a block below. His slight, spare figure was already visible obliquely between the trees. The big man rose quickly, fumbled in his breast pocket, and in a moment thrust his hand into the pocket of the slender youth beside him.

"Here," he said to the astonished boy, who squirmed exactly as he had done in the rotunda of the Mammoth Store, "you have made a mistake in my condition. I have returned from Alaska more than rich. I merely had no time to buy city clothes. These are large bills, my lad, enough and to spare for the sanitarium. But I want to keep this five-dollar piece to remind me of—what I still owe you! Don't try to understand. Some other time, perhaps—— Go home, now, to the girl and—bless you both!"

He hurried away to meet Stickton within his own gates. But before he emerged from the park he had spilled the cartridges from his pistol into a clump of shrubbery.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RECKONING.

In the murk of the shadowed garden Tom Stickton was slow to recognize the large man who mutely accosted him.

"Is it—Bill?" he asked, dubiously.

"Branchfield—yes."

"Why, Bill!" And Stickton thrust out an eager hand.

"Wait," said Bill roughly. At the hypocrisy of this simulated gladness he felt his gorge rising. But he conjured the figures of two boys and a pale youth, and held himself.

"Why, Bill!" There was astonishment and growing consternation in the voice. Branchfield stared across at him. Strange, ominous even, was this wordless facing of each other.

"Why, what's the matter?" Stickton was going to add "old man," but a notion of prudence left the two words unsaid.

"I think you know," replied Branchfield coldly. "I want some words with you."

Stickton studied him with a very frank anxiety—a pose, it seemed to Branchfield. "Well, come in—will you?" And he suited

the action to the word. Bill followed him toward the house.

The master of the dilapidated mansion let them in with a latchkey, crossed the pitch-dark hall, opened the door of the living room, crossed its bare, echoing floor to the old-fashioned chandelier, and lit two gas jets in their cracked globes. He drew up chairs, not too close together, and said, "Won't you sit down?"

His manner of grave politeness, as though humoring an unfortunate, incensed the big man no less than his speculative scrutiny of Branchfield's person.

"Yes, I'll sit down," replied Branchfield in a loud voice, "for I've got business with you. I want to know——" His voice failed in his dry throat. He scraped his throat and began again: "I want to know about this mortgage."

Stickton was still curiously regarding him, his homely face slightly puckered as his glance rested on the miner's clothes. Like all the rest, this "friend" was looking at his body—at his overalls, his hickory shirt, the frayed and faded Mackinaw. Branchfield could not hold his strained, starved brain cells away from the raw wound of clothes.

"Yes, look at me first," he broke out. "Look at me and ask yourself how much of that mortgage you bought I'd probably be able to squeeze out of them for you. Look at the worn, patched rags of the man that slaves with his hands in the open, without shelter. Look—and gloat if you like—gloat while you can. Take your fill of looking at the failure, the dead-broke, down-and-out failure——"

"I wasn't thinking of that," said Stickton, flushing. He seemed alarmed, and going up close to Branchfield, made as though to put his hand on the man's forehead to see if he was in a fever. It was what his wife had done that Sunday, three years ago. Branchfield struck the hand away almost with a snarl.

The slim, awkward figure of the bookkeeper shrunk back a step or two, his fists clenched convulsively at his side, and he smothered a savage exclamation that had leaped to his tongue. He bit his lip and closed his eyes. Speechlessly he stood thus for many seconds, mastering himself. It was a close call. But his faith in Bill was too perfect for even Bill himself to shatter. A weak smile—a ghost of the old dry smile that Branchfield knew so well—played about the corners of his mouth, and he opened his eyes and asked in quite his ordinary voice:

"Tell me, Bill—when did you eat last?"

It was said so naturally it took Bill by surprise, and before the thought occurred to him that Stickton was merely sparring for time he had already answered: "Yesterday—no this morning I had a quick bite."

"I thought so. And been ill, perhaps?"

"No," shouted Branchfield. "Ill, no. Sick—sick of lies and insults." He rose in impatience, his prepossession of rage struggling to rule him. "Enough of this nonsense, this maudlin, put-on sympathy. You all have it. You're all the same. First the covert glance at my clothes, and the contempt—the politely veiled contempt; and then the mock sympathy, the cursed, diabolical, false pity. Take your pity to hell. You hear me—to hell! *I* don't want it. I don't need it. I can protect myself—and mine—against forces, colossal forces. You puny, squirming worms down here—what do I need of you?"

With sudden pallor he dropped into his chair, bodily weak. It passed, but it had stopped his tirade. "Stickton," he said in an altered voice, "about this mortgage. No use to dodge. All the fiends of the pit can't stop me from knowing—and acting!"

Like many self-effacing men of a personality which condemns them to the rôle of onlookers of the tragi-comedy of life, Stickton had profited greatly in his quiet years from the vantage of the observer. Though perplexed as to what had infuriated his old friend, he had sized up the man's general condition, and something of its causes—sufficiently, at least, to enable him to keep off the rocks in this dangerous interview.

"I'll tell you all I know about the mortgage, and everything else," he said very distinctly. "Understand that and don't worry. But first let me give you something, a glass of brandy—or, better still, bread and milk. Now don't howl at me, please. Whatever it is that's the matter won't be helped any. Some milk, hey?"

"No—thank you," declined Bill surlily. "Do you so much as imagine that I'd break bread in your house till I know the truth about this mortgage?"

"What do you mean—'the truth about this mortgage?' Oh, I know you mean the

mortgage on your house," he added hastily, seeing new anger brewing; "but 'the truth' about it? What truth about it? It has been overdue about two years. You know that, of course."

"Yes, yes, yes, but—go on; what did you do?"

Stickton flushed again. "I got an extension—or your wife did, after the interest was guaranteed."

"Guaranteed by whom?"

"By—me."

"By you—yes."

"You knew about the extension, too. And you knew, didn't you, that Fiske warned us—your wife and me——"

"Us—me—your wife. There was a good deal of 'us' in it, it seemed," gritted Branchfield, with smoldering menace.

Stickton flushed again—this time down to his very neck. And again he shut his eyes in order to resist turning upon the man who was baiting him—most cruelly now. A spasm of pain passed over his face, as he said at length:

"You asked me to look after them. I would have wanted to, anyhow."

"Yes," said Bill stridently, "I asked you to look after them. And what have you done? What have you done?" He rubbed his clenched fist on the edge of the chair, and Stickton, perturbed as he was himself, saw perspiration on his forehead.

"What I could," replied Stickton with a simple dignity. "I had a year of notice, and though we hoped you'd be back to attend to it yourself, I prepared to take care of it, if necessary, for Mary—Mrs. Branchfield."

Bill stifled a groan at the naming again of his wife, and Stickton hurriedly added: "She could no nothing, of course, and for your sake she had——"

"For God's sake, man, tell me before I —tell me why you *bought* that mortgage —instead of simply *paying it off*. Tell me that!"

For a moment Stickton was perplexed. Then he seemed to grasp it; a look of understanding dawned in his patient eyes.

"Whew! So that's it, is it?" His lean features expanded into a kind of grin. He took a turn about the head of the room and came back scratching his head, his forehead wrinkled, one eye a little closed.

"Evidently you've seen Fiske."

"I have—and nearly throttled him."

Stickton raised his eyebrows, and went "Whew!" again.

"And I got this," added Branchfield, pulling the copy of the assignment of mortgage from his pocket and flinging it at Stickton's feet. Tom good-naturedly picked it up, but gave it the merest glance.

"Say," he inquired, "have you forgotten a thing or two about—now keep your shirt on, old man—about your wife, Mary Branchfield?"

"I *remember* a thing or two," corrected her husband, with cryptic significance. But it was lost on his auditor, whose reminiscent smile was whimsical.

"Imagine," he proposed, "any one presenting *her* with a canceled mortgage."

"Why not?" demanded Branchfield.

Stickton looked as if he were saying to himself, "And this man is her husband—hear him!" Aloud he said: "Mary Branchfield? Prouder than Lucifer—than a dozen Lucifers? Absurd!"

"Aha! So that's the way you'd explain it, is it? To save her feelings you buy it and put yourself in Fiske's place."

"Put myself in Fiske's place?"

"In Fiske's place. Master of her fate —whether she could stay in her home or be kicked out in the streets—as *you* pleased!"

"Kicked out in the streets if *I* pleased?" He had walked up to Branchfield, looking him full in the face as if to make sure he understood aright.

"You think I wished to have the power to put Mary Branchfield out of her house?" He said these words slowly, incredulously.

It took all of Branchfield's morbid power to look Stickton in the eye with an equal steadiness.

"Yes," he replied.

"And you tell me that I wished to *use* such a power—to use it to actually put her out of her house?"

"To use it as a threat—a lever, a whip, a bludgeon!"

Still squarely facing Branchfield, Tom Stickton pondered this with slightly moving lips, till the meaning of it came to him. Then he went white and fell back.

It was a moment of test, indeed; charged with an expectancy of curse. For a third time the pale bookkeeper was set to grapple with an affront now mortal to his honor and manhood. He fixed his accuser with an eye that was baleful with scorn and

wrath. It rested steadily at first upon the face of the returned miner. But gradually it went to his gaunt body, his toil-stained, tattered clothes, and back to his suffering face. And in that journey it seemed to glean something of the torture that dwelt within the man. Something strange had happened to poor old Bill.

Against the urging of the wrath that was rightfully his, he finally brought himself to say quietly:

"Come with me." And he led the way into the Cave.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FRIEND.

When he lit the gas it became evident even to Branchfield, who was in no condition to observe things closely, that this was no longer a used workshop. Here were yet the bench and the tools, but not the big model of the machine. In its place was a large packing case. One end of the bench, which had formerly been used as a kind of drafting table, was now littered with sundry papers and accounts. There was also a letter file, which Stickton opened somewhat carefully.

"Here," he said stiffly, "look at these things. They'll perhaps be more convincing to you than any naked words of mine."

They were letters; and as Stickton arranged them Branchfield caught glimpses of his wife's handwriting; and his heart began racing again. His wife had been writing letters to Stickton. Why? He seized them from Stickton's hands—the carefully folded little sheets, and read them.

They were brief, friendly, matter of fact—and businesslike; referring almost exclusively to the affairs at the bank and at the money lender's. He read the first few rapidly, taking their savor almost at a glance.

"But why letters?" he asked querulously. "Didn't you see her—to see that all was well—frequently?"

"Fairly frequently; about the right and mannerly interval, I thought. But after the first few visits she asked me not to call any more."

"She had to ask you that!" exclaimed Bill explosively.

"Easy," said Stickton soothingly. He had himself in hand, and no truculence of this half-crazed man should swerve him from his course. "Just try to be calm, Bill, and I'll tell you.

"She was frank. She said something about like this: 'Tom, it won't do. My husband is going to be away for months and months—perhaps years. I must begin right, and have as little to do with men as possible. Particularly here in my own house, alone, with only the young child.'

"It was before the little fellow was born, Bill. She said: 'You know the world. It has ears, eyes, and suspicions—nothing else. It is not enough—not nearly enough—to be right. One must have every appearance of it. Perhaps it is cruel, but it is the fact. At just the time when a woman may be loneliest she is condemned to a greater loneliness—that is if she is a prudent woman. Having men friends is perilous enough when she is under the constant protection of her husband. When he is absent, it is simply social suicide.' After a short pause she looked me bravely in the face and said: 'This applies with particular force to you, Tom.'"

"And what did you say?"

"I told her she was probably right. And I blamed myself for not having thought of it, and for having made *her* say it. And yet if I had said it it would have sounded queerly—perhaps almost like an excuse for neglecting a duty—which was also a pleasure—which I had accepted from her husband."

It sounded, even to Branchfield, fair and plausible. That was what *Mary* had done. Trust Mary for knowing her world, knowing how to avoid such punishments as had been visited upon him to-day. But what had Stickton done after she had forbidden him to visit her?

"Go on," said Branchfield.

"Then this:"

It was a longer note, which Branchfield read through. It was written nearly a year later than the first notes:

DEAR FRIEND: I thank you for your generous offer, but I cannot accept it. You have your invention, your future, to take care of. Each of us must stand on his own feet.

It was only the precious little addition to Will's family that put me behind in the interest. But I am stronger now, and can earn money to take care of it. If I fail with the interest, Mr. Fiske must add it to the mortgage and wait. But I shall try not to fail.

"You see," explained Tom, "I had kept tab on her account at the bank; and I had also cultivated Fiske somewhat, and I knew that the interest was in arrears. Well, it

got more in arrears, and while Fiske didn't bother her—after I guaranteed the interest to him—I knew Mary's methodically kept account book *would* bother her, with its record of unpaid interest staring her in the face. So—I violated my little understanding with you as to saying nothing about the loan you made me. Though, as a matter of fact, you permitted me to repay her some time before your return. This was the time to do it. I wrote her about it."

He glanced at the next letter and handed it to Branchfield. It read:

DEAR TOM: Your disclosure was no surprise. I knew that Will had given you some of the money. It was just like him. You may return it if you don't need it any longer, if you are sure that Will would consider that you didn't, and would take it back. In that case you may use it to pay off the accumulated interest and the new interest every month. I shall trust you to be honest and do exactly as I ask.

"Yes, yes," said Bill impatiently. "You acknowledged the debt and paid it, I suppose—paid it all?"

"Paid it all," repeated Tom. "As time went on, I paid it all—and interest. That was considerably over a year ago, and Fiske had added the overdue interest to the principal—compound interest!"

"He did, did he? And by what right?"

"Oh, he took the right. If Mary hadn't consented to it he would have refused to renew the mortgage."

"And after the money I gave you had all gone in interest—how about the interest after that?"

"I tried to persuade Mary to let me go on paying it. But she wouldn't consent—not a penny. She said you'd be home soon, or she'd—work harder and manage. I—I deceived her. I paid it anyhow, but she thinks it's still due."

"And then?"

"And then, a few days ago, before the expiration of the year of grace—which is to-day—I went to Fiske——"

"And you bought the mortgage!"

"And I bought the mortgage. And then I sweated blood racking my brain for a way of letting that woman of adamantine pride know that she was *not* to be kicked out of her home—without at the same time giving myself away. Of course Fiske would do nothing, being no longer a party in interest. But I couldn't let her suffer the anguish of hourly expecting the ringing of her bell by the sheriff. And all day long, yesterday, I kept batting that problem around my mental diamond—but there was no help for it. I had to lie. I wrote her that loan conditions had changed somewhat so that Fiske had concluded to allow her another year. Perhaps she's writing him a note of thanks, now."

Branchfield felt—almost physically—a fog lift and clear from his mind. He held his forehead as the last of it drifted away from the now clear picture drawn by these letters—so like her!—and by the plain and logical narrative of the man who had received them. What else could Stickton have done, if he wished to save her—what else, indeed, but buy the mortgage secretly.

Buy the mortgage! Great Scott, how could Tom, impoverished, under-paid Tom, buy a two-thousand-dollar mortgage? Once more Branchfield passed his hand over his forehead.

"But Tom!" he exclaimed, "where did you get this money? Where on earth did you get it?"

Stickton smiled in a rather sickly way, too.

"Bill, old man, the North has not made you more observant. Or has it been your anger, or hunger, or what? Have you no eyes?"

Bill gazed about him, puzzled.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SACRIFICE.

But only for a moment. He knew Tom must mean the bookkeeping machine. Sure enough, it was not in its accustomed place.

"It's not here?" said Bill, bewildered.

"Well, I wouldn't quite say that," replied Stickton, "for you might notice this packing case, about the size of The Old Man of the Sea. Well, here it is. The Will-o'-the-Wisp is ready to elude me fianlly—to slip into the Dismal Swamp of the Office Utilities Company, Cincinnati, Ohio. I had interested that concern in him quite a while ago, and as he was practically perfected now, I asked them for money and they offered me five hundred dollars, though it's common sense that if it's worth anything it's worth fifty times that. However, I gradually brought them up to a thousand, which they gave me on my note. They took it as security, but they insisted on a *short-term note,*" added Tom with rueful meaning.

"But that took time; you must have anticipated doing it?"

"Yes, naturally, I had to prepare for the mischance of your continued absence—your death, even."

Preparing for his absence or death! The words galvanized the not-yet-dead obsession of the false friend scheming to step into his shoes. The corpse of that hideous possession sat jerkily up.

"You schemed it far ahead!"

"Schemed it!" yelled Stickton, advancing close, standing on his toes to confront the other, face—actually—to face. "You're *right* I schemed it far ahead." His fist clenched, his frame shook with the super-earnestness of the diffident and shy when their slow-filled wells of emotion overflow.

"You don't suppose I intended to let that woman be turned out into the gutter, do you?"

It rang out—clarion clear! And to the inner ear of Branchfield, it rang true. It rocked him. He put out a faltering hand which found the narrow shoulder of the indignant friend.

"Tom! Forgive me!" was all Bill could say.

He stood thus for a moment, mastering himself; and then quietly—almost in a whisper:

"And the balance—the other thousand?"

Again Stickton smiled his sickly smile. The tension had lightened. He was again the diffident man.

"You are blind, old fellow—stone blind. You sat out there with me for fifteen minutes and saw—nothing! Come back."

And he led the way into the big living room—emptily resounding to their tread. Branchfield, his senses emerging from their paralysis, gazed in speechless, open-mouthed surprise at the bare walls and floor—their long-cherished treasures gone—a hollow, echoing place. And he looked at Stickton with a curiously awed, almost reverent look in his tired, haunted eyes.

"You sold them—parted with them—those precious things that were wife and children to you? The things your father and mother—that you loved so——"

"Oh, well," said Stickton, turning toward the window, "after all, they were just dust gatherers—damn nuisances—old junk."

Branchfield followed him hesitatingly; fearful to confront him too closely lest Tom should lose his nerve in this bold game of contemptuous unconcern.

"Liar," he said fondly, "old liar!"

Then recollections of his thoughts of this man overwhelmed him.

"God!" he broke out in dire revulsion. "This afternoon I wanted to kill you—I thought you coveted my wife."

At the last words Stickton turned, a slight shudder upon him.

"I love her," he said in the manner of a simple statement. "I don't covet her. I covet happiness for her—with the man *she* loves."

There was pause and silence—restful and understanding, as when the book is closed at the end of a faithful story.

"Yes," said Branchfield by and by. "Yes. The same Tom. The old Tom. And how I could have thought; how I could have let that devil pour his poison into my ears—his 'juice of cursed Hebenon'——"

He was back to his Hamlet again, but only for a moment. An humble eagerness seized him to explain and atone.

"I'll tell you—let me tell you what has happened," he begged. Then he almost fell into the chair.

Stickton was at his side in a moment. "Now you're coming right again. Fagged, and all in from *something*—but right again—the old Bill. Sure, old man, get it off your chest. What's happened? You're back—yet you haven't even seen the little wife and kids. That's perfectly evident. What's it all about?"

"I'll tell you," said Bill heavily. "I came in on the morning train, just crazy glad to get back, my hand fairly aching for the feel of a friendly fist, my eyes straining for the old familiar faces—for the light of recognition and of welcome. And something happened—a queer, terrible thing! The way they acted—it seemed gradually to go to my head. It tore me apart, some way, and filled me with poison. I didn't know it was in me—to feel that way. It made a raging beast of me—though I've held it in, mostly."

"Sort of snubbed you, did they? Figured you out to be just one more unsuccessful Alaskan coming back to get a job or make a touch. There's lots of them straggling in from time to time. And people have been sort of fed up on them. Romance all gone—not one in fifty did any good up there——"

"Yes, I suppose so. Still, many of the ones I met had had cause to remember me kindly."

"Sure! I know what sort of cause." And Stickton significantly jingled the money and keys in his trousers pocket.

"Yet *they counted seconds* on me till they could get away—till they could escape from the man who was down and out—the leper! It was a changed world."

Stickton had lit a cigar, and was walking up and down with a very energetic understanding. "But it wasn't, old man. It's just the same, and they're just the same. But *you* have changed—or rather your circumstances have changed your relation to them. And you got a chance to realize a few things that big-hearted Bill Branchfield, believer and practicer of brotherhood, had never been up against before. You won't mind my saying it, old man, will you? But—it's a matter of discrimination. You never used it. You looked upon the whole herd of them as your friends, when in reality only a few here and there - - -

"Oh, how thoughtless I am!" He suddenly interrupted himself as he noticed Bill's pallor and exhaustion. "Just a minute——" And he hurried away to the kitchen and returned with bread and butter and milk.

"Here; this'll do you more good in five minutes than you'd ever extract from that bunch of cattle in a century—— Well, try to, anyhow. I tell you, you're all in, Bill."

Bill took the tray on his knees and looked at the food upon it.

"I came for blood, and you give me milk," he said with a shamefaced grin.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FEAR.

Bill ate at first meagerly; then, as the food awakened physical responses, ravenously. But before he had eaten half of what Tom had set before him, he suddenly arose like one alarmed.

"My wife!" he exclaimed. "Here I am in Centerville for hours and hours. But I'm afraid—miserably afraid." He shuddered.

"Afraid?"

"Yes, or I'd have gone to them at once—passed across town like a streak, of course."

"Why, you didn't expect Mary to turn you down, did you?"

"Oh, not exactly 'turn me down'; not ignore my hand, or hurry to get away." He smiled wanly at the absurdity of it. "But that pride you speak of, her preferring death, almost, to accepting help—it's a fine thing in its way, this feeling of the enormous importance of owning your own dollars. But the other side of it, that you don't see; the craving to have them—many of them; and the exalting of that possession and of the people who possess them above everything and everybody. Think of it; think of it, man! I—they—all the creatures of good faith and honest purpose that try and fail—to be accursed, to be marked for avoidance and disdain—lepers, I tell you! And when the first man and then the little girl I had befriended, and Henderson, and a few more of them began to open my eyes, the thought of Mary darted to me arrayed in a thousand disturbing memories of little things—the months of veiled, hinted discontent, culminating in my throwing up my position and going away to be a savage, savagely tearing in the earth for money. And then her letters—'Stay and succeed. Stay, we pray for your success!' Why, it has just kept my eyes turned toward home all day, and I shiver at the thought that—— Oh, I know she loves me, as a woman loves a man, but——"

He paused and stood, one hand upraised and trembling:

"Just one look, one look, Tom, like their looks; just one shifting of the eye away from these clothes, these danger signals of failure—and her kisses would be loathsome, yes, even from Mary—loathsome."

Stickton was unperturbed. "Yes, I know you're always thought her 'worldly,' as you call it, but I've never recognized the portraiture. Success? Oh, yes, but—— But I say, Bill, I've got a suit of clothes too large for me upstairs. Perhaps by wearing them you could tide over the first shock of disappointment that you think she'd feel."

"Imagine it!" exclaimed Branchfield, with bitter indignation. "Having to dress up—to masquerade in borrowed clothes to meet my own wife, mother of our children!"

"But of course it would be temporizing at best," admitted Stickton, "for any one could spend his last few dollars for a suit of clothes."

"'My last few dollars,'" repeated Branchfield. The words seemed to ring a bell in a chamber of his mind. "But it wouldn't be that with me." His face took on a whimsical, almost guilty look, as he became conscious of his unintentional deception. "I've been so beside myself with anger and misery and fear that I'd almost forgotten that I've got money—plenty of it."

Stickton smiled good-humoredly.

"Comparatively plenty of it, you mean. Enough to tide you over till we can get you started off again. How much, old man? The cost of bread and milk is mounting steadily—come, disgorge!" And he held out his hand peremptorily.

"All right," returned Branchfield, taking him at his word and reaching into his pockets. "I've brought down a little—just a little of what we have up there, gruff George McTavish and I." And he handed Tom his wallet, and his nuggets, and his certificates of deposit.

Stickton, bred in a bank, took in values at a glance.

"Our certificates, our cashier's signature—thirty, sixty, sixty-two thousand and—yours? Great Jehosaphat, man, what does this mean? You a failure—broke—patched overalls, lumberman's tattered coat! Why, you damned old fraud, you. What do you mean by it!"

He flushed—blushed with honest pleasure, and Branchfield, knowing him now under the acid tests of the last hour, aye, of the last year, had a brief interlude of joy at the disinterested, unworldly gratulation of a friend.

"Fraud nothing!" he denied gayly. "I had more important things to think and talk about—my friends!"

And he told him briefly of the chance circumstances that had brought him from the Alaskan wilderness to the very streets of his home town still clad in the rough garb of the Arctic miner, and then of his grim resolve to carry through as he was.

"But Chisholm!" objected Tom incredulously. "You mean to tell me that slick old Chisholm ever let on that he had the slightest suspicion you were not arrayed in that manner to conceal your wealth?"

"Believe me, I gave him no hint of wealth till after he had his chance to insult me—and took it! Only then did I trot out my drafts."

"And he nearly dropped dead?"

"Pretty near. Though—I've got to hand it to him—he carried off his surprise rather well."

"He would. That's Chisholm. And I'll bet he tried to square himself and do business with you. It's evident he did." And Tom tapped the crinkling certificate.

"It's the last. This is just a temporary deposit, and I told him so plainly. And, by the way, can we buy back the pictures and cabinets and rugs and things?"

"Why, yes, Bill; nothing was to be sold for three months."

"Fine. And about The Old Man of the Sea. When we pay those Cincinnati people, would you let me have an interest in him if I put him on the market for you?"

"*Would I?*" echoed Tom explosively. It was all he could say, but it was enough.

"Then we'll write some checks to-morrow," announced Bill.

"Never mind to-morrow. I don't want to see you for days—till you get acquainted with William *Thomas*—get that?—Branchfield. Some boy! Which reminds me that it's getting late, and he'll be sound asleep and his sister too, if you don't go home."

"Home?" repeated Bill despairingly. "Yes, of course, I've got to——"

"Got to!" Stickton's unhealed heart throbbed at the thought. "Imagine it! 'Got to go home' to that God-given woman!" Aloud he said:

"Tell her at once—instantly—of your good fortune."

"And never know until the very end of my life—*never know* how she would have received a failure?"

"Go as you are," said Tom. "Trust her. She will not fail you." And he almost led the faltering man across the hall, and gently shoved him through the doorway.

Bill groaned and staggered down the steps.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GOLDEN TESTS.

William John Branchfield was one of those idealists that are hard to awaken. Truth shakes them by the shoulders, but they dream on. Nothing short of an explosion of facts that flings them bodily to earth will rouse them to the verities. But once their eyes are opened, they are not easily lulled again into security. They pass from a deep somnambulism to a staring in-

somnia. For there is no distrust so inveterate as that of the trustful who feel that they have been betrayed.

It was well, then, for Bill that, after dragging him through a purgatory, the gods that loved him had thence guided his footsteps to the newsboys at the gutterside, to the despairing clerk in the park, and to the denuded living room of Tom Stickton, genius of friendship as well as of invention. For these had sown in him seeds of a new and rational faith, and had thus tempered the wind to the shorn lambs whom he was now approaching with a doubting and aching heart.

And one more preparing was given him for the ordeal of reading Mary's eyes. For as he turned into the little gate of the home that was still his, a line of fluttering white in the rear of the house caught his eye, and he felt impelled to walk down the path, quietly, and see what it was. It proved to be a phenomenon very familiar to the children of the widows of the poor—lines of washing much longer than so small a family could require. Mary Branchfield was a laundress!

This was the way she had earned money. Rather than find "genteel" work downtown, she had preferred this arduous labor at home, where she could be fully a mother to her children. Would Mrs. Lucifer have done it? It struck the husband of this "worldly woman" that her pride was not of the variety called false. As he retraced his way toward the front of the house, he thought of those white hands he had so often petted and kissed, and a pain lay at his humbled heart.

Had he been a few minutes earlier he would have seen her at her ironing board, for she had worked a while after supper and ceased reluctantly at the insistent call of Elsie—lispingly mimicked by a younger voice—that it was time for a "papa story." And the papa story was now in progress in the bright little sitting room, with Elsie on a very small chair at her mother's feet and the very little boy sleepily cuddled in his mother's lap. The rocking of the chair and the "Once upon a time there was a big, kind man named Papa," always came together and were the last things this little man could remember at the close of each day.

Except *this* day! He had almost lost consciousness over "And he dug and he dug," when he was awakened by a knocking at the door, and he opened his eyes just as his mother arose with him in her arms.

Few came to her door after nightfall, and these always rang the bell. Who could this be who was thoughtful enough to knock upon the door of a house that sheltered little early-to-beds? She stood a moment wondering. Was it the first time a gentle knock had sounded. No, no! Three years before one had knocked—the gentlest, most considerate——

Alert, her heart hammering, she glided to the door and opened it—and looked into her husband's face!

"Why!" she exclaimed. There was a sharp intake of breath. Then, "Will!" This was a wailing cry as she leaped forward and pressed her face and neck against his. But an instant later Mary, the wife, stepped back, and Mary, the mother, thrust her son into his father's arms. Bill strained the little fellow to his heart.

"He is your little boy," she said tremulously, and began to cry.

He put the child down gently, kissed little Elsie, and waited until his wife should become composed and looked more closely at him. So far, he knew, she had only seen his face.

She smiled through her tears.

"Such a surprise; such a joy!"

And as she made these breathless exclamations Mary, the observer, was resuming sway. Yet it was *his face* that directed her eyes to his garments, though he was unaware of it. He knew he was steadfastly watching her eyes till they should look him over, but he did not know that his fearful apprehensions of that inevitable scrutiny were plainly written in his face.

When her eyes came back to his he saw in them a troubled look—only that, as yet. And he said timidly, a little sadly:

"You look me over, Mary, just as they all did—all my friends—all day to-day." He thought that he was quiet, almost casual, and that was all. He little knew!

They call it intuition. Very well. But it was mind—only racing straight to the goal—perception. They study us—these women that love us—and learn us literally *by heart*. Three years and a great change—*but she knew!*

Across the space between them she flew to him and drew his head down to her breast and sobbed:

"They've hurt you—the beasts!" Over her shoulder she flashed her furious scorn, and her small, red hands became fists.

"Never mind; never mind." She petted him. "As if it mattered—in the very least." She made him sit in a chair, and bent over him.

"Will, why Will; you've had a shock—a terrible shock. You're not yourself. Though you're looking—you *would* be looking—so well and fit and strong."

Loving and loyal—so like Mary, he thought as the swift hands, after so long, were ministering to him again. And yet, what were her thoughts—clever, tactful woman that she was? What did she really think down deep in that proud heart of hers?

Ah, the obstinacy of the big-hearted, once betrayed! His was the dread of the child burned not once, but seared by licking flames for hours.

"The clothes belie me, Mary. I had no time to buy clothes. The whistle blew; and again in Seattle the train was due. I am not the failure that I seem. These old working clothes were an unintended deception.

"They do not go with this!" And he emptied two sacks of nuggets upon the table. "Nor with this!" And he spread out before her eyes the certificates for thousands. "Nor with the rest of it—many times as much that we still have up there in the frozen earth. The success you prayed for so often I won for you!"

Her face—his eyes were on it with the expression of the hungry who yet fear poison—lighted up at first with a naïve brightness, with the natural, pleased look of those who moil for silver, for food and warmth for themselves and their dependents. But his manner—overdrawn, dramatic, hectic—spoiled it—worried, then alarmed her. And she looked away from it to him, as he boasted of the hundreds of thousands still locked for them in the clutch of northern ice. But when he said the success she had prayed for he had won, her perplexity was cleft by another lightning stroke of vision. It fathomed his fears. But more. It pierced to the heart of that old misunderstanding, and she recoiled from the money in horror. At that recoiling Bill's spirit leaped to her in joy.

But he had yet to deal with an indignant woman. Mary had found tongue!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HEALING.

"I pray for that—*that!*" she cried flaming. Almost with venom she swept the nuggets from the table and tossed aside the certificates.

"You think a woman's prayer for her husband is so cheap! I might pray for money for a good doctor for you, but for just pure money—Will, Will, how could you think it of me!"

Her resentment flared again before it broke. She struck the last nuggets from the table's edge.

"*That* is not your success, even though success might gain it. Money or no money—that is in the lap of the gods. A worthy struggle, a good fight carried to your satisfaction with yourself—*that* is what I prayed for for you."

She came to him, her anger melted to tears of reproach, and touched his tattered sleeve. "Oh, Will, it's not the bank certificates that are the symbol. It's these rough clothes worn by a man unused to bodily labor, willingly worn, toil-stained, for wife and children. These are not garments of failure, but of success."

He strained her to his heart.

"It was—just luck."

"It's good—luck is. It's good, this money. I'm glad—or I shall be. But I'd be sorry to my dying day if it could intensify or even prolong that old misunderstanding. So let us sit down—and banish it forever. See, the little ones are playing with the heavy, bright little pebbles. Let's settle with those pebbles, once and for all. They're only to be used to spend to do things and get things. That's simple. Now, much of the money that you earned you spent to do good to your friends, and to get friends, didn't you?"

"Yes, Mary."

"And did you get—*many?*"

"And did I not—— Oh, I despise the woman who says 'I told you so.' At least, I pity her!"

Branchfield took her gently by the shoulders and faced her. "You *did* tell me so, or tried to. I'll say it for you. And I thought—well, you know what I thought."

"And I knew the day would come when you would see the futility of helping them by sacrificing yourself in that way. And I knew *that* day would be failure to you—

a day like to-day. And I did not wish you to meet that kind of failure—to be bankrupt of your wealth of imaginary friends."

"I am glad!"

"And I, too, now that it is safely over. But I was afraid, and so I longed for success not only for itself but in order that that other kind of failure might be averted for you. I did not think you would find gold, not when you left and not afterward. Too many, with more aptitude for such a life, had failed. And I expected to go on helping till you tried something else. For rather than have you meet the scorn of those—creatures! I would have worked my fingers to the bone——"

"At this work you spoke of——"

"Yes at—er—what I was doing, even." She glanced quickly toward the kitchen.

"At 'what you were doing.' Yes. As I came in I saw those ghosts of the buried pride of the Branchfields flapping on clothes lines. Discreet woman! You never said *what it was* that you were doing."

"Hard work was good. It kept me from going crazy in the silence—the whole world seemed silent when month after month went by—nearly two years, and no word."

"We were miles and miles away in a most savage wilderness." And he told her the story of the long isolation, and the droll tale of the squaw and her perennial tea. She smiled many times as he told it, but at the end she sprang up.

"No; after all, not luck! Your goodness of heart, that sharing spirit—always sharing——"

"Sharing with my friends! I'll tell you what I did. I sowed—and reaped to-day. I sowed the wind, and I reaped the whirlwind."

"But up there—to that old dying squaw in the bare, bleak river sand—that was a different giving. You cast your bread upon the waters."

"My tea, my dear."

"Your tea—your bread, the bread of life, it was. I'm glad, glad. Oh, if it had always been that kind of giving, I would have been content to live on crusts with you.

"What is the answer, Will?"

"Well, let's alter the words of the Good Book a little and say that it's a darn sight more difficult and dangerous to give than to receive."

"And all day you met your whirlwinds—and they blew you away from your own wife, is that it?"

"Yes. And it nearly was worse than that. The Lord only knows where I was drifting when—luck again—two little newsboys, the ones I used to buy papers from—sometimes two of the same edition—you remember?"

"Yes," she replied, with eyes wide.

"*They* were grateful. Two dirty, profane little urchins—they thrust their money, pennies and nickels, into my hand. But I was still *mad*—at the others, the older ones—yes, and at Tom. And then I met another grateful one, and finally—Tom."

"Tom, faithful old Dobbin—what could he have done?"

"Nothing. But there was an appearance—I'll tell you some time. It had filled me with furious resentment. And I saw him and—found out what a *great friend* really looks like. Then I began to quiet down."

"And came home to the wordling wife."

"To the worldly washerwoman!"

"And the two worldly children—look at them!"

The shining pebbles, investigated with all the science of the youthful world, had failed to answer the children's questions; and they were waiting, with their chubby hands full of nuggets.

"What are they—papa?" asked Elsie. She used the story name of the big man timidly.

"Answer, papa. Call them anything but 'success'!"

"These failures," said Bill. He began again. "These trifles mean——"

"*Independence!*" said the proudest woman in Centerville.

Elsie clapped her hands. "Why, mama says to-morrow is Independence Day."

"It is, for us," said Branchfield with fervor.

"You bet!" agreed Mary profanely.

"And it's a holiday, mama says, but not for her."

Bill knew what that had meant. There was a happy moisture in his eyes as he gathered his little family close.

"But she didn't know that your papa was coming. It's going to be the biggest holiday, and the longest one your mama every had. And we'll get Uncle Tom to be your sweetheart, and we'll just have the *grandest celebration!*"

The Mirage Trail

By H. H. Knibbs

Author of "The Ridin' Kid From Powder River," Etc.

Benito, who made his bow in the last number of this magazine, shows the stuff that he is made of in the present story. Friendship is more than a name to Benito, and he proves it in the case of Jimmy Gale

"YOU want to make fight or something, yes?"

Jimmy Gale, erstwhile prospector, ceased his restless pacing up and down in front of Benito's cabin. "Nope. I'm peaceful. But ever since we sold our claim to that Los Angeles outfit, and put the cash in the bank, I been wonderin' what to do next. I could go to prospectin' again. But, somehow, the fever's kind of died out. Bein' rich"—Jimmy possessed something like four thousand dollars, and his debts were paid—"being rich is all right if you can keep busy at it. I sure can't. Here I been loafin' for two straight months, fillin' up on scenery, and beans—eatin' and sleepin' and plannin'—what? Plannin' forty-seven different things—and doin' nothin'. First thing I know I'll be gettin' fat."

"Not for long time," said Benito, eying Jimmy's lean, hard frame.

"And lazy," continued Jimmy.

"You get him now, I think. We make hunt, eh?"

Jimmy shook his head. "Too risky, these days. Them rangers is gettin' most as thick as the deer, up this way. And it's closed season on both."

Benito chuckled. "Then we take those burro and make to pack in some of the grub, yes?"

"Well, we might do that, just for somethin' to do."

"She pretty hot."

"Yes. And it's hotter down in the valley. But let's do somethin'. Now Skyrocket there"—and Jimmy gestured toward a sleek, fat saddle animal that grazed in Benito's pasture—"is gettin' fed up so high I either got to exercise him or buy him a pair of corsets. And he's gettin' snuffy. He can't stand too much prosperity, same as me. Why, he's gettin' right hard to catch, *him*, that used to just reg'larly shove his head into the bridle when I held it out."

"I watch you try to catch him, yesterday. And I think it is that my friend Señor Jim he don' make the leg go so fast like once."

"Don't make the leg go fast! Say, Benny, I chased that hoss more 'n ten miles yesterday mornin'—and done it in your pasture here, which is about twelve acres. If that ain't makin' my legs go fast, why you take your rope and show me."

"Your rope he just a little short, every time you try, yes? I see you chase that horse. He wise. He make you run so you don' get fat too much when you ride him."

"Mebby. But honest, was you meanin' it when you said we'd go to town?"

"Me, I'm no joke like that. We go."

"I'll go—if you'll catch that cayuse. Anyhow, I'd like to see you do some runnin' yourself; to kind of make up for your watchin' me sweat, yesterday."

"Oh, I catch him, all right! It is much easy, that."

"Oh, all *right*. Go to it."

Benito shook his head and grinned. "No. I make him come. I don' go. She too hot."

And Benito picked up a bit of tie rope and entered the pasture. Jimmy smiled. If Benito could catch Skyrocket with a short tie rope, when Jimmy himself could not catch him with a forty-foot reata, Benito was some horse-wrangler. Benito, who never seemed to move quickly, walked down the pasture to where his burros were grazing. Jimmy watched him lazily. Then he lay back and gazed across the valley toward the ridge trail that led to town. Heat waves danced along the hillside. The sage and greasewood had a peculiar, metallic

sheen in the white light. Jimmy sighed heartily, as though content with life as he found it just then—he was stretched out in Benito's old canvas chair, a chair, as described by Jimmy, "mighty easy to get into and mighty hard to get out of." There was shade round the cabin, and an olla hung near the chair. Jimmy half closed his eyes. This was comfortable—and as for going to town—well, perhaps to-morrow. Benito would never catch Skyrocket in time to make the trip and back that afternoon.

Ever since he had sold his mine in the Buckhorn country, Jimmy had, day after day, promised himself that he would go to work, at something. But day after day, as the spring grasses along the stream turned from a deep green to a sun-burned brown, Jimmy had tarried at Benito's cabin, planning trips back into the hills, trips to the city, and even into the desert. He smoked many cigarettes, out in the cool of the starlit evening, cheating himself into the belief that he would "start something" next morning. As yet he had started nothing except the top button on the waistband of his overalls, as he expanded under the influence of good meals, and an easy life to which he had been a stranger until quite recently. The realization that he had money in the bank had satisfied him, for a while. He also had the friendship of the "Lion of the Mountains"—Benito's name among the Mexicans of Chilao—and Benito's friendship was something to be proud of, as Jimmy had good reason to know. Jimmy had paid his debts, purchased new raiment, bought himself a new six-gun—his old gun having passed into the hands of a benevolent Hebrew in town, and in a moment of weakness he had purchased and packed to the cabin a phonograph which he had wound up assiduously, only to have each concert interrupted by the inevitable and dolorous voice of Benito's big black burro, who never failed to hasten to the pasture fence line nearest the cabin whenever Jimmy essayed to play a tune. Jimmy was at first annoyed—then amused by the burro's insistence in joining in the concert. Jimmy tried out all the records he had, on the big black burro, who made no distinctions of silence, even when "My Rosary" followed perchance "The End of a Perfect Day." Jimmy tried to catch the black burro off his guard by playing early and late—at noon, in the evening; and once he woke up at midnight and started the machine, just to see if the black burro could be caught napping. The "Mad Song" from "Lucia" had probably never been played under more peculiar circumstances, nor had it ever had a more peculiar accompaniment. Lucia had hardly begun her wild marathon after the flute, when the burro heaved a diapason into that melody that amazed even Jimmy. As for Benito, he raised in his bunk, startled from a sound sleep.

"*Por Dios!* It is the music! Me, I think first that the Señor Jim he have the great pain."

Jimmy tried once more, in daylight, when the burro was feeding with his companions at the far end of the pasture. The tune was all but concluded and Jimmy was congratulating himself that he had enjoyed one uninterrupted selection, when, from far down the valley, came the big black, his tail straight up and his ears laid back. He arrived just in time to help the cello put the finishing touches on "Narcissus," played by a string quartet. "You win!" said Jimmy as he rose and solemnly covered the phonograph with a gunny sack, in a manner suggestive of obsequies and flowers. And Jimmy referred to the burro.

From that time on Jimmy drifted on the lazy tide of the summer days, enjoying the quiet of the hills and Benito's unobtrusive companionship. Jimmy had let out two holes in his belt and several in his ambitions. It was the first time in his active life that he had really been able to take it easy. But he found that taking it easy, after the first few weeks, was hard work.

"Reckon my soul is gettin' rusty," he confided to Benito.

"I think it is that some hombres they sit still for long time, that she think of everything she see and everything she know, and then she begin think inside himself. That is bad!"

"You bet! Same way with a hoss. If he ain't got nothin' to do, he just feeds up and gets to thinkin' what a bright and shinin' animal he is—and then he is no good to hisself or nobody. Or else he gets to thinkin' what a low-down, ornery cayuse he is, and first thing he knows, he does somethin' to prove it." Jimmy was thinking, at the time, of his own horse, Skyrocket, ordinarily a most law-abiding animal, but of late just a bit more inclined to snort at a bridle than was good for him.

From his chair in the shade that afternoon Jimmy witnessed a little comedy that Benito had planned to stage when he said he would catch up Jimmy's horse. Benito appeared, leading the black burro. The other two burros followed. In the distance Skyrocket stood, his head high, watching them. Benito never glanced back, but plodded steadily along, the burros following. Benito dropped the gate of the small corral near the house. The burros shuffled in. Benito closed the gate, stepped to the lean-to stable, and returned to the corral with a nose bag half filled with barley. Skyrocket, down the pasture, stamped one foot and snorted. He trotted a few steps, stopped and went to grazing. Meanwhile the three burros were he-hawing their delight. They knew what rolled barley was. So did Skyrocket, for that matter. Again he raised his head and watched the burros. Benito had given them only a small feed apiece—but it was a change from grazing. Skyrocket was not in the least hungry, but he was curious. Benito unfastened the gate to the corral and opened it. Then he walked away. Skyrocket nosed along the burro's tracks, pretended to shy at the gate, wheeled and trotted into the corral. Without raising his head, the big black plumped a double-barreled kick on Skyrocket's most prominent outline. Skyrocket squealed and nipped at the burro. The big black burro dodged and walked away, leaving Skyrocket to smell the place where there had so recently been a handful or two of rolled barley. Benito, coming from the lean-to stable with the packsaddles, chuckled.

"I say it is much easy, yes?"

"But you didn't *catch* that hoss—you trapped him."

"If you say he is not catch, then I open this gate again, yes?"

"Hell, *no!* You didn't *catch* him—but you *got* him. And it's too durned hot to figure out the difference. Now I reckon I just *got* to ride to town."

"I think no, if the Señor Jim he don' want."

"I'm stickin' to my bargain. Said I'd ride to town if you could catch up the cayuse. Can you figure how I can get out of it without goin' back on my word?"

"Si! The Señor Jim he can walk."

"Oh, you go to—town!"

"Where you mean, she pretty hot. Where you say, she pretty hot, the same."

Jimmy grinned. "Benito, you're all right!" Jimmy's grin died into gravity. "But honest, do you know what I'm goin' to do when I get to town?"

From Jimmy's sudden change of manner Benito inferred that Jimmy had bethought himself of some important duty.

"What is it that you do when you get to town?" queried Benito.

"Sweat!"

"I think you catch them sweat before you get to the town," said Benito.

"I think I catch them sweat," quoted Jimmy. "I think I catch them sweat." Jimmy rose and stretched. "Moses in the mountains! now who would 'a' thought of sayin' it that way? I think I—— Oh, say, Benito, I'll sing 'Mother Macree,' if you spring any more of that——"

"I buy you two of the what you say, pop, if you don' sing him. Then them burro she don' feel bad."

"That's fair enough. And 'Mother' sure needs a rest."

Lives there a cowboy with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, "For once in my life I'm a hundred dollars ahead of the game—and here goes to spend her. I sure need a new hat and boots, and mebby a new pair of chaps. The old saddle and the old hoss'll do, for a spell yet."

Jimmy Gale, erstwhile cow hand, recently prospector and at present capitalist, had purchased some new raiment and boots—and a new six-shooter. Common sense and hot weather inclined him to leave the six-gun and belt of cartridges at the cabin. But that ingrained vanity which seldom leaves a real cow hand until he has turned forty or better, prompted Jimmy to buckle on his gun as the finishing touch to his appearance.

Benito, realizing that Skyrocket would want to step along on the way to town, gestured to Jimmy to lead. Skyrocket was naturally restless and soon distanced the burros. Jimmy glanced back occasionally, and occasionally reined in: but finally he gave Skyrocket his head. "Reckon we'll both catch them sweat afore we get to town, at this gait," said Jimmy.

Skyrocket was in a lather when they reached town, and Jimmy, who had grown a bit soft while loafing at the cabin, was hot, thirsty, and not in his best humor.

Being utterly human, and not exactly averse to having Johnson the storekeeper realize that the sale of the mine was a

reality, Jimmy did not call for ordinary pop bottles—"them with the corks wired down," he explained. It was a hot day and the ginger ale was not on ice. Jimmy opened one bottle in his free-and-easy way, and without estimating the range of super-heated ginger ale. He had pretty well soaked a bolt of gingham before he got the ginger ale headed his way, as he put it. Johnson was not pleased. Jimmy waved his hand. "Just charge that there calico up to me," he said airily. And he called for another bottle of the same.

Few folk were to be seen in Acton that day. Even the usual store loungers were not visible. Jimmy sighed as he grasped the second bottle firmly.

"I aim to get some of this inside of me," he stated. "But we'll play safe on the calico this trip." He stepped to the door and untwisted the wire. The cork did not budge. He shook the bottle gently. "Reckon if she does go, she'll go strong," he said, and he turned and grinned at Johnson. Just as he turned, some one stepped up on the far end of the store veranda. Jimmy's grin broadened. "Reckon it's Benny Benito. He's due pretty soon. If this here cork would only start," and he shook the bottle again. There was a faint hiss, and Jimmy approximated the appearance of Benito and aimed his bottle at the middle of the doorway. Before he could change the direction of the shot the bottle of ginger ale exploded with a gallant report and the cork hit Hank, an old desert rat, square in his left eye. Jimmy was so taken aback when he realized who the object of his bombardment was, that he failed to divert the gush of ginger ale that followed. Adding insult to injury, he pretty well deluged Hank with ginger ale before he realized just what he was doing.

Hank and Jimmy had had trouble once before—when Jimmy had ordered him off his claim, which Jimmy had subsequently sold to good advantage. Hank, who had really jumped the claim, had threatened all sorts of vengeance, but he had moved on and had not been seen in Acton for several months. Nor would he have come to town then, had he not been driven to it through need of provisions. He was not popular in town—and moreover he had stolen the burros of the two men that he had taken out to the hills, on the occasion of trying to sell them Jimmy's claim. In other words, Jimmy could have made a safer shot.

Hank wiped his eye and whiskers, and spat on one side or the other of his lone front tooth. Then he also realized who had bombarded him, saw that he was armed, and like his kind, he immediately attributed the attack as a premeditated insult. To make it worse, Jimmy, who had no natural animus whatever, hesitated between apologizing and laughing—and laughed. Without an instant's warning Hank pulled his gun and shot him down in the doorway. Johnson saw Jimmy stagger and reach for his own gun, and he heard the sand-muffled hoofbeats of a horse put into action quickly. He ran round the counter and dragged Jimmy into the store. Then he hastened to the telephone and called up the local doctor. A man came running from across the street. Other men came—and a woman, carrying a baby in her arms. They crowded into the store and gazed down at Jimmy. They asked foolish questions. The doctor came in his trousers and undershirt—but he had his case of implements with him. Jimmy was lifted to the counter. Some one fetched water. Then the doctor told Johnson to put the people out. As Johnson closed the door and was about to bolt it, Benito, still unaware of what had happened, although he saw that something had gone wrong, strode to the doorway. Johnson hesitated. He knew Benito to be Jimmy's friend. The doctor was bending over the injured man.

"Come on in," said Johnson, "but don't make no noise. Your pardner's been shot."

"The Señor Jim!"

"Yes. Hank got him. Jimmy was foolin' with a ginger-ale bottle——"

"He is kill?"

"Dunno."

Benito pulled off his hat and stepped softly to where the doctor was at work.

"He goin' dead?" queried Benito.

"He's hit hard. You know him?"

"He my friend."

"Well, I can't say yet. Anybody notify the sheriff?"

"I been tryin' to get him," said Johnson.

"I get him," asserted Benito. And he tiptoed to the doorway and out to the street. He still had his hat in his hand. His face was like the face of a child that is puzzled and distressed. He twisted his hat in his hands. "I find out," he said to himself.

He gazed round. Jimmy's horse was gone.

In fact, Benito had seen Skyrocket at the far end of town, going on the run, but had paid no attention to that. Jimmy was apt to do something like that, at any time. Benito turned back to the store. The group at the windows gazed at him silently. What would the Lion of the Mountains do, now that his friend had been shot?

Johnson came to the door and stepped outside as Benito gestured to him. Always garrulous, the storekeeper became more so, with an audience such as he had then. He told of the joke that Jimmy Gale had intended to play on Benito—and of its sudden and dreadful climax. Benito listened tensely.

"You say it was that hombre Hank that shoot him?"

"Sure! I didn't see him shoot, but I seen him untie and mount Jimmy's horse a second after. And the horse is gone, ain't it?"

Benito stood for a second, as though undecided. Then he crossed the road. He met the sheriff on the way to the store. He went back with the sheriff and waited outside until that official had Johnson's report of the shooting. When the sheriff came out, Benito drew him to one side and begged to be sworn in as a deputy. The sheriff was only too glad to get his services. If there was a man in the county who could run down the murderer, it was the Lion of the Mountains. And Hank was spoken of as a murderer, because the doctor had told the sheriff that Jimmy hadn't one chance in a thousand of recovering.

"I get him," said Benito after the sheriff had sworn him in.

And when the people of Acton had been told what Benito had said, they nodded their heads. It would be a long chase and a hard hunt—and Benito would not hurry. And when Benito came back, he would come alone—and he would have nothing to say except to the sheriff. But Hank would never return to Acton. They were certain of that.

And Benito did not hurry. First, he went to a Mexican friend and borrowed a saddle mule—a rangy, angling animal that showed no sign of speed, but an animal that would outlast a horse twice over on the desert. Then Benito bought some supplies, packed them on his burros, and started for his cabin. Late that evening he arrived at his cabin, turned the burros into the lower pasture, slung his rifle on the saddle, and, after eating, he set out for the head of the valley. Hank had made out of town toward the east. Benito headed into the north. He surmised that the fugitive would strike for the desert, and get rid of the horse at the first opportunity. Benito had instructions to get his man, dead or alive. As he rode along, under the summer stars, he talked with himself.

"I don' kill that hombre, if I can help. If he shoot, then I kill him. If he don' shoot, I don' kill—but those desert she kill him—and she make grave for him. Si! Then I show him where is his grave."

Benito camped next day at Dead Horse Springs, a water hole just below the foothills that sloped to the desert. He hobbled the mule and left him in an arroyo where there was grass. The small store of feed that he carried would only be used when absolutely necessary. He knew that he would sleep soundly because of fatigue and the heat. He wished to make a start about four o'clock that afternoon, and travel all night. He took the small pocket mirror that he always carried for a peculiar reason, and propped it against a stone at an angle that would find the sun about four o'clock. Then he lay down facing the mirror, and slept. His back was toward the sun. When the sun touched the mirror the reflected rays would shine in his eyes and awaken him. He knew that he could have stayed awake by forcing himself to it, but he was too wise to use up his vitality in that way. There would be times when he would have to stay awake and watch, but here, on the edge of the desert there would be no occasion to lose sleep.

Out on the sand the light played strange tricks as it drew mirage pictures of inverted hills and palm-bordered pools. An almost invisible something, not tangible but apparent, seemed to creep across the spaces and curl along the far hills to the east. Sudden puffs of wind, seemingly self-created, whirled here and there, spinning sand-funnels that rose and rose toward the blue and moved off into the distance. The intense light burned down on the scattering sagebrush, that thinned toward the north as the levels spread to the desolation of the actual desert, where no man lived and where few journeyed. And into that land, treeless, almost waterless—a land whose very aspect forbade approach, Benito would travel, without haste, and yet steadily, until he found

some trace of the man he was after. And to find such a trace he would visit each water hole, to either take up the tracks of some one who had been there, or to lie in wait for some one who would come. He would find the man, if he had to journey the rest of his life. Yet Benito had set out with no anger in his heart. Anger exhausted one. He had set aside all personal feeling, save the one imperative demand of his soul —to find a certain man and follow him to his grave in the desert.

Two men rode up out of the south—not over the ranges as Benito had come, but along the western edge of the hills. They wore faded overalls, shapeless hats, and shirts that were rusty-colored by the sun. Their horses were ewe-necked and lean. These men looked like neither prospectors nor cow hands. Yet they seemed at home —traveling directly and silently and with a peculiar quiet alertness, evident as they neared the abandoned shack where Benito slept; for before they reached the shack they separated, one riding round it on the east side and one on the west. The little mirror was flickering with the first ray of the afternoon sun to reach it, when Benito sat up. One of the men told him quietly to stay just where he was. The other asked him what he was doing at the water hole.

"I sleep," said Benito.

"Prospecting?"

"No. I lose them burro again."

The men glanced at each other. "Somebody steal 'em?"

"Si, I think, yes. I think I find him."

"Which way you headed?"

"Me, I go where I find that hombre."

One of the men nodded to the other. They dismounted and led their horses to the water hole. Benito sat watching them. "Guess he's all right," said one of the men to his companion. "You can't tell. But he ain't after us. He's from somewhere around this part of the country. Wonder if he's afoot."

"There's a saddle in the shack. I saw it as I stepped up to him."

"Uh-uh? Then he's got a horse around somewhere. Keep your eye on him while I make some coffee. If he makes a wrong move—you know what to do."

"He'll only make one," asserted the man spoken to, and they filled their canteens and slouched back to the shack.

Benito had hidden his deputy's badge in his pocket. He had planned to use it only in case of extreme necessity. And there was nothing about his appearance to excite suspicion. He seemed to be just what he had intimated that he was, a man looking for stolen burros. The strangers told him he could drift along if he wanted to—and Benito understood.

"I get that mule," he said.

"All right—only, bring him here to saddle him."

Benito knew better than to pick up his rifle, so he left it where he had lain down, and, taking his rope from the saddle, went after the mule.

When he had disappeared up the distant arroyo one of the men picked up the rifle.

"He's hunting more than burros. Look at this." And he handed the rifle to the other.

"A thirty-forty—reg'lar man-stopper. He ain't hunting burros. He's hunting the man that took the burros."

"Think he'll talk?"

"I dunno. I size him up as willing to say nothing—and willing to have nothing said about him. If he had been after us he wouldn't laid down in plain sight and gone to sleep. He's got his own little game —and we got ours. I'll try him out when he gets back."

As Benito saddled the mule one of the strangers asked him which way he was headed.

"I go over there," said Benito, pointing toward the east.

"Spanish sink?"

"Si."

"Know this country?"

"Si. I know him."

"Think you would know us if you seen us again?"

"I know you like this, when no other hombre is here. Other hombre here, then I don' know."

"You're a wise bird, mister. Well, drift along—but you want to forget you seen us—sabe?"

"Si. I forget all mans but one mans. I make to find him."

"What does he look like."

Benito shook his head. "It is that I don' talk what he look like—and I don' talk what the señors look like, yes?"

Benito mounted and turned toward the men. "I go. But I think, perhaps, that Spanish sink she go dry."

The men glanced at each other quickly. It was the first hint of curiosity as to where they had come from, on the Mexican's part. They wondered why so cautious a man should have risked asking even that seemingly natural question. Benito saw their hesitancy. He nodded and waved his hand.

"I go find out."

He drifted away in the lengthening shadows. The men drank their coffee and ate beans that they had warmed in the can over the fire.

"Burros nothing!" said one of the men. "He's after that old desert rat that tried to trade horses with us last night. And he had a mighty good cayuse—too good for him to be riding. No, the Spanish sink ain't dry. And the man he is after has got a good twelve hours' start. Well, I just as soon he was trailing that old-timer, as us. Did you notice the mule the Mexican was riding?"

"Think I'm blind? That Mexican knows his business. 'Course, if he had had a star on him, why—he'd 'a' stayed right here."

"He's in luck," said the man spoken to.

Benito realized that he was fortunate to be where he was, instead of on the sand back there with a bullet hole in his head. He knew that the wrong word, or even gesture, would have meant a killing. It was only too evident that the men who had questioned him were taking no chances. And it had been quite as evident to them that Benito had been taking no chances.

Dusk settled over the desert and almost instantly it was night. Benito set his course by the peaks beyond the distant Spanish sink, and rode steadily, yet with no haste. He even hummed a little song—an old Spanish song that he loved. As the night deepened he talked to himself occasionally. And often he spoke to the mule, as though that patient animal could understand.

"You don' know for why you go like this. I think it is that if you belong to that Hank, you go jus' same. You take me where I find him, yes? All time it is like that. Some hombre he kill—and some hombre he kill him. Long time I live—and it is never change. Perhaps it is that we don' come back. Perhaps those desert she kill you—and she kill me, yes? Perhaps she don' kill that Hank, jus' same. Then he live long time—and he kill my friend. You don' know why for it is like that. Only those desert she know why it is—and she don' talk, only little sometime when she say it is bad for any hombre to come here: if he don' look out she kill him, jus' for to make kill! I look out, you bet!"

And Benito thought of his friend, Jimmy Gale, Jimmy of the red hair and the blue eyes—and of the blundering chance that had sent them to town at a time when Jimmy's sworn enemy was there. And even as Benito thought of the shooting and of the desert rat, Hank, he had no anger in his heart, perhaps because he felt so certain that Hank would pay in full measure for his crime.

"But he don' pay me," argued Benito. "And he don' pay the Señor Jim, who is dead. He make pay to something I don' know, that he kill my friend. Me, I think I come jus' for see that he don' forget to make that pay."

Benito watered the mule at the sink, refilled the canteen, and, after eating some jerky, he circled the water hole. He found the tracks of the two men, whom he surmised had ridden from the sink to Dead Horse Springs. They had ridden in to the sink from the east. Their pony tracks were parallel. But farther out he discovered the tracks of a solitary horse that had come in from the south. Round the sink the tracks were jumbled and crossed, but a wider circle disclosed the trail of a rider headed north. This rider could not be a prospector, or he would have had burros or mules—and no man rode a horse into the desert beyond, if he knew anything about the country. A horse could not long stand the intense heat. And there was no feed in that land. Had Benito found burro tracks leading north he would have followed them. As it was, he camped at the sink until noon, when he rose and rode east. There were a few scattered ranches along the eastern foothills. Benito did not expect to find the man he was after at any of these ranches—but he did hope to find Skyrocket. And if he did find the horse, he would make no inquiry as to how it had come there. He simply wanted to make sure that he was on the right track. Time would answer all other questions.

It is a hard thing to deliberately leave a definite trail and follow that which is commonly termed a "hunch." But blind intuition is often a better guide than open-eyed logic. Moreover, Benito had lived so long in the hills that he knew, without reasoning it out, just what a hunted animal would do

under most circumstances. The man he hunted was shrewd and experienced in the desert. He would not do the obvious thing. So Benito felt justified in not doing the obvious thing in following the plain trail of a rider into the heart of the desert.

Riding east in the glare of noon, he reached the edge of the hills about sunset. There was no water in the foothills that was not fenced, so he rode up to the first homestead and asked if he might buy feed for his mule and supper for himself.

Only too well aware that his nationality was against him, he proferred money in advance, which the rancher accepted and in return allowed Benito to "bed down" in the stable. Benito was up at dawn that he might look over the animals in the rancher's pasture. And he had good excuse. His mule had strayed to the far end of the pasture during the night. Skyrocket was not there.

Benito asked no questions, but left hurriedly. He would ride all that day, from ranch to ranch. Should he find Skyrocket he would know that Hank had struck out into the desert from that place. But he would not ask. He would ride out and in a semicircle whose either end would touch the hills. If there was a single track leading into the desert he would find it.

At noon he pulled up in front of a ranch that reached back into a broad arroyo. The house was set among a clump of trees, far back. The bench land in front of the house was planted to alfalfa. Evidently the pasture would be in the hills. And there was brush in the hills. It would be difficult to distinguish an animal in the brush. Of course he could ask—but should he do so, the chances were that he would learn nothing. If Hank had sold the horse, the rancher who had it, would not, ordinarily, say so. Benito could show his badge and demand to see the stock; but that would mean talk—that there was a deputy sheriff out looking for somebody, and Benito knew that news travels mysteriously and swiftly, even in the outlands. The mountain lion never advertises his approach.

Benito hesitated. He was weary and willing to rest. To go in and visit with the folk would be natural enough, especially at noon, when no one journeyed save through extreme necessity. But he had watered the mule at the ranch below—the third he had passed that morning. And he would lose an hour or two if he went in. What he wanted was to see the pasture. While he was pondering, some one shouted to him. He unfastened the gate and rode down the lane between the fields of new alfalfa.

A man stepped down the lane to meet him. He was ruddy, stocky, and extremely light-haired. Benito noticed that the man's lips smiled but that his eyes never changed expression.

"What you want?" queried the rancher.

"She pretty hot. I was think mebby I come in for little while. Then I was think I go find my brother, who write the letter to come pronto. He sick."

"Well, you won't find him here."

"I don't think I find him here, señor. I was not come in. You do the say, yes?"

"Thought you was somebody else. You can fasten that gate when you go out."

Benito felt that this was more than suspicion. It was to say the least, direct insult to a traveler. The man had not even asked him to water his mule, or to fill his canteen. Ordinarily gentle and good-natured, Benito would have let this pass. The Americanos hated the Mexicans, as a rule. But there must be a reason for the other's patent anxiety to get rid of him. Benito glanced past the rancher toward the house. A boy was just leading two horses from the stable. That was it. The rancher was about to go to town, or to some neighboring ranch, and did not want to leave while there was a stranger hanging about the place. And this was natural enough. Benito turned and rode down the lane, never glancing back until the shoulder of the hills hid him from sight. North of the ranch fence, at a turn in the road he came suddenly upon a clump of trees. The mule swerved from the road and before Benito could check him, had pushed through the brush and was nibbling at the scant grass along a tiny and dry water course. Benito smiled. "I think we take little siesta, yes?" And he took off the mule's bridle and loosened the cincha. "I was think to go too quick," Benito said. "I wait. Then I go back and look."

The air was close in the arroyo, despite the shade. Benito smoked a cigarette, nipped out the fire before he threw it away, and, stretching beneath a dwarfed acacia, went to sleep. The mule strayed on up the arroyo, nipping here and there at the infrequent clumps of dry grass. Benito awakened suddenly from a heavy sleep. He was

sweating and felt listless. He had slept over an hour, as the angle of the sun told him. Stretching, he rose and trailed the mule up the arroyo. This was losing time, but he did not blame the animal. The arroyo narrowed and deepened until it was a cañon, and the cañon ran back and up into the hills, either to a box, or broadening to the rounded tops of the range. The mule had gone far—even far enough to find a seep of water near the head of the stream bed. Benito was stooping to drink when he heard the mule's feet on the hillside to the right. Evidently the mule had come to the end of the cañon, and, tracking part way back, had climbed the easier slope. Benito made directly for the sound, clawing his way up until he struck the easier slope. On the rim he saw that the mule had come up a well-defined trail that led from the head of the cañon to the higher level where he stood. Then Benito knew why there was so little water in the stream bed.

The spring at the head of the cañon was used by the rancher to water his stock and possibly for irrigation, as the head of the cañon was above the ranch level. Benito found the line fence a few paces beyond, in the brush. Where the trail met the fence there was a gate. His mule was standing at the gate as though waiting to be let into the pasture. In wandering up the cañon the mule had smelled the tracks of other animals and had followed the tracks. It was natural enough—but it had wasted much time. Benito spoke to the mule as he approached it. But the mule merely laid back one ear. The other was pricked forward inquisitively.

"What you see?" queried Benito.

The ground round the gateway was cleared of brush. Benito gazed across the pasture. Halfway across and grazing contentedly was a dark bay horse, with a peculiar splotch of white on his flank. Benito whistled. The horse flung up its head and gazed at the man and the mule near the gate. The horse had already seen the mule, but had not been interested. But the sudden appearance of a man interested him. He trotted forward a few paces, swerved gracefully, and, tossing his head, broke into a gallop that took him to the far end of the pasture. Benito caught his mule, made a "Spanish bridle" with the tie rope on the saddle, cinched up and rode down the trail toward the head of the cañon.

"I find him," he said, and his muttered remark had a double meaning. He had found Skyrocket, quietly grazing in a strange pasture many miles from Acton. And he would find the man who had ridden him to the edge of the desert.

And as he jogged down the cañon, Benito expressed himself to the mule: "Some mans they kick you, amigo, for make him such a long walk. Me, I don' kick. You make pasear up those cañon to find something to eat, yes? I make pasear to find you. Then I find the horse of my friend what he call Skyworks, yes? I find him because you hungry, yes? So it is that I find the bad hombre that kill the Señor Jim—because I'm hungry for find that man."

The sun was dipping toward the western ranges when Benito crossed the foothill road and circled out into the desert. He was traveling in a wide arc that swung past the distant ranch house in the trees. A half mile out, and almost directly in front of the ranch house he found tracks that led toward the west—into the heart of the desert. The tracks were those of a man and a burro. The tracks were not over three days old. Their edges in the sand had not crumbled much. Benito followed the tracks until assured that the traveler had headed for the water hole above Dead Horse Springs. In a few hours he would not be able to see the tracks, but he knew where the springs lay. At dusk he gathered a few sticks and roots of greasewood and made coffee.

Contrary to his usual custom when traveling, he ate heartily—and had left in his saddle pockets only the jerky and hard tack—but he could live on that for several days, if he did not have to go without water. By carefully measuring out the rolled barley in the morral—and the emergency supply in the gunny sack tied back of the cantle, he could feed his mule enough to keep him going for at least two days, without other feed. He had taken as little as he dared take that he might travel swiftly. If the man he was after decided to hide out near Wagon Wheel Springs, toward which he was evidently bound, it would be of no advantage to try and locate him. The country about the springs was broken up into ledges, barren ravines, queer, hidden caves, and wastes of volcanic rock. A man might hide there indefinitely if he had food and water.

Benito's thought came to him so suddenly that he reined the mule to a standstill with-

out realizing that he had done so. But he did not talk to the mule, as was his custom with animals. "We go back," he said. The mule came round of himself. He knew the desert, and understood that the man-thing that rode him had changed his mind. Benito did not have to urge him to a lope. Back in the hills were feed and water. And back to the foothills rode Benito—and the mule was in a lather when they reached the arroyo near the road. Benito unsaddled, packed his jerky, hardtack, extra sack of tobacco and tie rope in the gunnysack, tied a cord to one end of the sack and to the mouth of it, cached his saddle and bridle, picked up his rifle and canteen, and leaving the mule to pick up the barley, which Benito had taken pains to scatter in several little heaps, he turned his face toward the stars that bordered the darkly looming bulk of the western range.

He could travel faster on foot than the man ahead with the burro. Yet Benito would not have left his mule to wander up the draws and arroyos of the foothills had he not seen Skyrocket—almost by accident—in that hidden pasture. As for the mule, he could take care of himself for many days, as there was grass and water in the upper reaches of the foothills.

By traveling steadily all night Benito knew he could reach the edge of the bad lands round Wagon Wheel Springs at dawn. And because he was so positive that the man he sought would be hiding there, Benito chose to go on foot, that he might be able to watch the water hole without his presence being advertised by the mule. And to watch the water hole rather than to hunt the man, was his plan. Of course, the man might have gone on, but Benito could still travel faster than a man with a burro, in that event.

The Bad Lands toward which Benito plodded, begin and end abruptly. For miles round about the floor of the desert is fine, grayish sand, supporting no vegetation, no life of any kind; and there is scarcely a pebble to break the smooth and almost stunning silence of the monotony. Out of this absolute solitude rises a barrier of ragged buttes and pinnacles, raw red, grotesque and forbidding. Outcropping ridges of smooth volcanic rock lie black and glaring in the sun, like the backs of half-buried monsters of an unknown age. Pitted and worn by wind and sun, the pygmy hills slowly crumble and disintegrate, scattering round their bases fragments of red, splintered rock that in turn disintegrates, often at the pressure of a boot heel, and that which has had form becomes formless—a tiny heap of coarse sand. Yet the ribs of volcanic rock, the black-backed monsters, seem indestructible. Age has but polished their somber surfaces, smoothed and rounded them until they offer no resistance to the driving sharp sand that so often volleys across them, hissing and writhing in strange shapes as it passes swiftly from opening to opening or curls and piles itself against the blank wall of a butte or hill. The place seems burdened with itself, desolate, accursed, unaccountable. And as if unwilling to be even seen by man, it hides the one solitary excuse for man's presence there in a maze of splintered rock—a seep of bitter water that issues grudgingly from a triangular crevice, a drinking place inaccessible to animals and almost inaccessible to men.

A few hundred yards from the water lies a warped and sun-split wagon wheel, its spokes fallen from the hub, the fellows checked and separated, and the tire slowly wearing to nothingness. Its story is its own. There is no other sign of human handicraft near it.

Benito had passed through the place once, looking for a man who had been lost on the desert. He had been well paid for the attempt, and had been offered a reward if he found the man, whom he had tracked to the edge of the Bad Lands. All he had found had been the wagon wheel, and the seep of bitter water. That had been many years ago. Since then the place had become known as Wagon Wheel Springs.

When the first low ridge or rocks loomed beneath the stars, Benito quickened his pace. He did not want dawn to discover him in the open. If the man he sought should be there, Benito surmised that he would be watching, from some rock-strewn pinnacle. Moreover, it would be next to impossible to travel within the Bad Lands at night. There were pits and crevices, imperceptible against the black rock, even at dusk. And to pick him off from behind some bowlder would be easy enough, even in daylight. So Benito decided to make the most of the night. He drew nearer to the ghostly barrier and then began to circle it. He would not enter the place from the east or south but from the north. He had two reasons for this: one,

that Hank would hardly back-track—and the other, that if he should decide to leave, there would be a chance of either seeing or tracking him north.

Benito was halfway round the circle of rock when the first hint of dawn warned him to seek cover. He plodded to the wall of a ragged butte, and, dropping his pack and rifle, lay down and was asleep almost instantly. Though fatigued, he was troubled with strange dreams, inconsequential and weird in the main, but one recurring vision bothered him. Jimmy Gale seemed to be alive and trying to tell him that it was a mistake to follow Hank—that the prospector was not worth the risk. Benito dreamed, or thought he had dreamed this, several times. When he awoke in the glare of the sun he rose and shook the dream from his shoulders.

"It is that I think the Señor Jim is live—because I want him live. But it is not so. That dream she make the lie to me because I am tire, and inside I say—*Por Dios!* But there is no man here. I go back. But I say to them talk inside—*Por Dios!* I see!"

Benito had no great and noble ambition to risk his life in the attempt to find the grave that he had promised himself the murderer should seek of his own will. To the contrary, Benito was exceedingly careful not to expose himself, nor to run any needless risk in hunting his man. He drank from his canteen, weighed it in his hand, examined his rifle, and, after chewing a piece of jerky and barely tasting the water again, he rolled a cigarette and smoked and gazed out across the spaces. It seemed like a waste of time, but he was simply getting himself together. He did nothing hurriedly, even when inspired by intuition. He always planned carefully and saw his plan through.

Caching his supplies in a hollow in the rock wall of the butte, and monumenting the spot with a few stones, he picked up his rifle and strode to the next ridge north. From its crest he scanned the Bad Lands.

"She look more bad every time," he muttered. "I don' think I stay long time in this place."

Toward the middle of the piles of jumbled rock and ribs of tufa he could see the spot that marked the spring. But intervening were hundreds of rock-walled byways and lanes, and a man among them could not be seen from the ridge. Benito crawled down and walked round the ridge. He turned once and glanced back at the burning emptiness of the outlying desert. Then he strode toward the heart of the maze, not crouching, nor apparently overalert, but as he hunted when out after game, with his rifle in the hollow of his arm, his head up and only his eyes, constantly shifting from side to side, indicating that he was looking for anything save the water hole. But he never passed a ridge or butte without first stepping round it and assuring himself that it did not conceal his enemy. Yet when he was within the very center of the Bad Lands and not far from the spring, he did not go to it, but circled slowly toward the west.

Even where there was scant chance of finding tracks he looked for them. Isolated patches of sand lay between the rocks, and he scanned each smooth gray patch, not expecting to find a footprint, but hoping to see a fresh burro track. Toward noon he rested in the shade of a butte, and, as he rested, he realized that he had undertaken the impossible. A man might hide in that maze of hills and caves indefinitely. To find him by tracking or searching would be out of the question. Benito's one hope was that the burro would betray the whereabouts of the fugitive. The hunted man would have to come for water—but he might come at night, or in the day, when Benito was asleep; when the stagnant heat would make it all but impossible to move about.

Despite the heat, Benito circled the rocky waste that afternoon, often standing hidden and watching the mouth of some shallow cave for several minutes, listening intently for the slightest sound. Then he would move on, and climb some ridge where he would lay outstretched, watching and waiting, and suffering the torture of reflected heat from the rocks.

Toward sunset he had arrived at his cache. He drank sparingly and ate a little jerky. All about him the silence seemed to heave and writhe as though struggling to break into speech. Benito was too accustomed to solitude to become superstitious, or nervous, but he did pause in the making of a cigarette, as if to listen for something he expected to hear. Then he shook his head, and was twisting the end of the brown-paper cigarette when he was startled by the distant, melancholy note of a burro's plaint—a protest against the eternal loneliness of the outlands.

Benito finished rolling the cigarette, and he smoked it. The sun was touching the edge of the western hills. He would have but little time to search, but he determined to make the most of it. When the sun was gone he was stretched out on a high pinnacle overlooking the heart of the Bad Lands. Dimly he could discern the skeleton of the wagon wheel. Presently it vanished in the dusk.

In spite of himself he slept. He had planned—not to watch, for that would be futile—but to listen. The patter of a burro's hoofs or the grating of a boot heel on the rocks would tell him what he wanted to know. He awakened suddenly. It was morning. The sun was just marching out of the eastern haze. Benito raised on his elbow and gazed toward the spring. "I see if he come while I sleep," he said and rose to leave the pinnacle. He had gotten to his feet when he sank down again, resting on one knee. A man's head showed in the distance, round the angle of a rock-walled lane. Then came his shoulders. Benito could see the glitter of his belt buckle. The man was leading a burro, but the burro was not packed. Benito knew then why the burro had brayed the evening before. And Benito also knew at once the shuffling gait and the stoop of the man. It was the prospector, Hank. Evidently he had kept the burro tied in some cave, until assured that there was no danger of immediate pursuit.

"He don' get that burro to those water, no? He bring those water in his hat, I think."

But the prospector had no such humane idea. He led the burro past the bleached wagon wheel and tried to get him over the impassable and jagged rocks that hedged the spring. The little animal stumbled and fell again and again. The desert rat kicked him as often, forcing him to his feet. Slowly Benito's hand reached out and grasped his rifle. Slowly he drew the rifle up and centered on the man; a tiny figure in the distance, no bigger than a rabbit against the front sight. Benito had no idea of killing the man. He had acted almost mechanically. He knew that the burro was not his —but it was black and looked much like his own pet animal. As the burro struggled to its feet again the desert rat kicked it, even before it was up. Benito slightly shifted his elbow. The sun blazed on the front sight and blurred it. He blinked, and the sight came clear. Against the sight was the tiny figure of a man—and the man was standing still. The burro lay on the rocks, evidently exhausted. Benito saw the man draw back as though to kick the animal to its feet again. Then came the shattering *crang* of a high-powered rifle, and the man doubled up and slid forward on his face. Benito blinked and looked at the rifle, rose and felt of himself, then nervously wiped his sweating hands on his overalls.

"*Por Dios!* It is not that *I* shoot! I look and look—and then that rifle she say she don' like what he do to those burro. Something she pull on my finger, yes? But I don' pull on those trigger, no."

The black burro raised its head as Benito appeared, but the little animal was too exhausted to get up. As for the man who lay sprawled on the rocks, Benito turned him over. Then he rose and crossed himself.

"It is good I do not kill," he murmured.

He fetched water and washed the ragged wound in the desert rat's head, and bound it up with his own bandanna. The high-power bullet had torn the scalp, and the desert rat had bled much, but he was far from dead. Benito filled his hat at the spring and gave the burro water. Again he filled his hat. The burro drank.

"I think *you* go," said Benito. "But him, I don't think he go quick."

Benito dragged the wounded man into the shade of a rock, and went back to the burro. The burro was trying to get up. Benito helped him and steadied him from the maze of jagged rocks round the spring.

Somewhere in that labyrinth of rock-walled passages, in some cave or on some hidden ledge, the prospector had cached his supplies and made his camp. Benito knew that he must have packed in some feed for the burro. If the feed could be found, and the burro given a chance to eat and recover its strength, the question of getting the desert rat out of the Bad Lands would be answered. Benito would travel at night, back to the foothills and the rancho where Skyrocket was pastured.

When Benito returned to the desert rat, that individual was conscious. He gestured feebly toward the spring. Benito fetched water. Then the desert rat recognized the man who had shot him—the Mexican Benito, Jimmy Gale's friend.

"What you goin' to do?" queried the rat feebly.

"Me, I fix you up, and I fix up those burro and I take you back there—for that you kill my friend Señor Jim."

The rat closed his eyes, not so much through weakness, but because he feigned weakness—and he wanted to gather his scattered wits. So Gale was dead? Well, no Mexican would haze *him* back to the scene of the shooting—and to jail.

"I take that gun," said Benito, and he secured the rat's six-shooter. "We go when the night come."

"I can't travel," muttered the rat.

"Then I pack you on those burro. We go."

The rat saw that he was trapped and helpless. He knew that Benito would take him out. When Benito asked him where he had cached his provisions, he perversely refused to tell. Benito gestured to where the burro stood.

"He tell. I find him."

And Benito rolled a cigarette and squatted in the shade beside his enemy. Presently the burro turned and walked off stiffly. Benito rose and followed him, not close enough to urge him forward, but keeping him in sight. The little animal tracked through several rock-walled passages, and finally stopped. Benito waited, but the burro did not go on. On a wide ledge, just above where the burro stood, Benito found the packsaddle and the provisions. He fed the burro, waiting patiently until the little animal had finished eating. Then he cinched on the packsaddle, and, taking flour and coffee and a blanket with which to pad the saddle, he led the burro back to the spring. The sun was close to the edge of the hills when he arrived. The prospector lay propped against the rock where he had been left.

"We go now," said Benito.

The rat made no reply.

"You drink the coffee?" queried Benito.

The desert rat seemed to hesitate, then he nodded. Benito broke some splinters of wood from the fellows of the wagon wheel and labored to make a fire. The desert rat watched him. And as he watched the dusk drew down. Almost instantly it was dark. A tiny flame twinkled on the rocks and above it was Benito's passive face. "He'll go for water," soliloquized the rat. "He'll fill both canteens."

A little later Benito picked up the canteens and felt his slow way toward the spring. The rat heard him stumble among the rocks. Then the rat raised himself, and, crawling toward the fire, felt on the ground until his hand touched Benito's rifle. Turning, he crawled back to the rock, where he sat propped against it, barely discernible in the shadows. He could hear Benito working his way back from the spring. The fire was dying down. The Mexican would have to break up another piece of the hard wood to get it going again. When the fire blazed up——

Benito was splintering a segment of the old wheel with a heavy rock. He was stooping above the embers, feeding the fire. The rat could see him, half in shadow. A little flame spurted up and showed Benito's dark, expressionless face. He turned to pick up one of the canteens. Slowly the rat drew the rifle to his shoulder. Deliberately he centered the bead on Benito's forehead. There was no chance of missing at that short range. The report crashed out and reëchoed along the imprisoning, rocky walls. The rat saw Benito's hat flip from his head—and he saw the Mexican's hand flash toward the six-gun in his belt. Stunned by the realization that he had missed, then spurred by a quick fear, the rat rose and ran staggering into the night. Benito, who had jumped away from the firelight, ran to one side, and, dropping, flattened himself on the rocks. Almost instantly a hoarse, half-smothered scream racked the silence. Benito lay and watched the little fire flicker and die down to one red ember.

One by one the red buttes and pinnacles pushed through the half light of morning. Charred bits of the wagon wheel lay in a little pile of white ashes. Back in the mazes of that rocky pile, the burro stood directly beneath the ledge where the rat had camped and hidden himself. Benito rose. In the sudden flare of morning he saw his rifle near the rock where the rat had lain. There was no further need for caution. The rat was unarmed.

Benito picked up his rifle and strode toward the east. A hundred paces from the rock he came suddenly upon a wide crevice, too wide to jump even in daylight—and sheer walled and deep. He peered over the edge. He called the rat's name. Then rising he found a fragment of tufa and dropped it in the crevice. He heard it strike, and then strike again as it caromed from side to side, far down. He shook his

head. The man whom he had hunted had found his grave.

The following day a rancher in the foot hills, returning from town, met a Mexican riding a gaunt mule and hazing a burro along. The burro was without pack or pack-saddle. The rancher noticed that the Mexican rode with a heavy rifle beneath his knee, and that a deputy's star gleamed on his faded shirt. They nodded to each other as they passed. The rancher thought that he had seen that Mexican somewhere—and that gaunt, long-striding mule. Yes, it was the man that he had virtually ordered off his ranch, a few days past. But at that time the Mexican had not worn a deputy's badge, nor had he had in his possession the burro that the rancher had traded in part payment against the horse that a desert rat had seemed anxious to get rid of. Well, it was none of his business. He had the horse, and would keep it in the back pasture until he got a chance to sell or trade it. His chance came a month later.

When Benito arrived at his cabin, on his way to Acton, he turned the burro into the pasture along with the mule. His own burros accepted their brother animal, but protested against the presence of the mule, who merely acknowledged the protest by driving them all to the far end of the cañon and then returning to a place near the corral, where he grazed leisurely. Benito unlocked his cabin. Some one had been in it. There was but one other man who had a key and that was the Señor Jim. No, he must be mistaken. Nothing was disturbed—but there was the Señor Jim's old hat on the table. Benito examined the windows and the back door. Nothing had been tampered with. He had forgotten that he had left Jimmy's hat on the table himself, just before he started for the desert. And because the hat was there, it bothered him. It seemed so like former days, to come in and find Jimmy's hat on the table, or the floor, or anywhere but where it should have been.

After he had eaten, Benito cleaned his rifle carefully and hung it on the wall. Then he smoked and thought of his friend—and of the other man, out there in the Bad Lands. Well, men had always done such things. It was lonesome in the cabin. Benito rose and stepped out to the pasture fence. His burros, dodging the mule, trotted up and nosed his hand. The strange burro, standing a little way off, watched them. He was not accustomed to being spoken to in a kindly way—and he was still distrustful of men. "Mañana, I go to the town and I say that I come back. The sheriff will say 'where is that hombre? Did you find him?' Then I say, 'He don' come back.' "

"But how am I going to report it?" queried the sheriff, as Benito sat in his office the next morning. "You say that he won't come back. That don't bother me none. But what happened over there in the Wagon Wheel country?"

"He find the grave. I say he do that. Something she say to me he do that. I don' kill him."

"Well, between you and me, it don't make much difference. He sure tried to kill Jimmy. And I guess he would 'a' tried to kill you if he got the chance."

"Si. He try, all right."

"I thought so. And you just naturally plugged him. Well, Jimmy won't feel so bad about that, either."

"Where you make the grave for the Señor Jim?"

"Make the grave! Why didn't anybody tell you! He's in the hospital in Los Angeles. We all thought he was a goner, but that boy is tough."

Benito's dark eyes widened. "You say he don' bein' dead."

"Hell, no! I sure thought some one told you, the way you come in, so easy and cool. Funny you got by the store without hearing it."

"I don' stop. I come quick," said Benito.

"Well, Jimmy is going to pull through. Guess I'll just make out the report on this case as assault with intent to kill and the gent with the intent as disappeared."

"Si. He do that," asserted Benito. "You got paper with Señor Jim's place on him?"

"Meaning the hospital? Sure! Here's the address."

"I think I go," said Benito.

"Well, you can turn in your badge when you get back. It will help you to get into the hospital. Just tell them you are from my office."

Benito, his hat in his hand, followed the nurse through the long corridors and to a door which she opened gently. Benito blinked. How like the Señor Jim that thin-faced, pallid man looked, as he slowly turned his head. Benito shuffled in, hesitant, and

rather awed by the white silence of the room.

"I come back," he said simply.

"Well, I'm comin'—slow, Benny."

Benito fumbled with his hat. "I bein' in those Bad Lands."

Jimmy's gaze drifted toward the nurse's face. "Here, too," he murmured, and he smiled faintly. Then his old self shone for a second in his weary eyes. "How's the burros?"

Benito smiled. "I think you goin' live long time," he said. "I go back. I tell those burro what you say. I think it is that they laugh, yes?"

And Benito turned and left the room. The nurse shrugged her shoulders. Jimmy noticed. "He's the only real thing I seen since it happened," he said. "I reckon I been ridin' the Mirage Trail, nurse. But that was old Benny, sure enough."

The nurse had a vague idea of what a mirage was. Her idea of Benito was not so vague. He was swarthy, rough, uncouth, stupid, without feeling—and the patient had said he was the only real thing he had seen since the shooting! The nurse was pretty, pink, placid, and not without sentiment. The patient interested her. It had been rumored about the hospital that he was rich. And she thought that he was rather good-looking.

As though expressing his general idea of womankind yet with no such intent—for Jimmy was thinking of Benito and his three burros, Jimmy shook his head.

"Oh, shucks!" he exclaimed. "Say, nurse, how long before you can turn me loose?"

The next story in this series by Knibbs is called "The Lion of the Mountains," and will be in the September 20th issue.

PREHISTORIC HERITAGES

INDIVIDUALS among us who have inherited some of the traits and faculties of our prehistoric ancestors—which have been lost to most people as civilization advanced—have sometimes, even in these days, an advantage in their possession. One of these faculties, inherited by some from phehistoric man is that of "keeping their heads" on great heights, acquired by our remote ancestors in cliff climbing and in their arboreal pursuits. Undoubtedly, the men in the fire departments of our large cities who can balance themselves on cornices and other projections outside of tall buildings while rescuing inmates from fires have inherited this faculty. This also applies to many of our aces in the late World War, who acted coolly and methodically in guiding their aëroplanes, surrounded by perils, the mere thought of which causes a thrill when their feats are recorded.

Another prehistoric endowment, which has descended to some people of the present day, is the ability to "shin" up a pole. Among boys there are some who, when at play, can "shin" up a pole with ease the first time they attempt it, and there are others who cannot and who never learn to do it properly. To climb a pole in this way requires a certain coördination of the leg muscles, which some of us do and some of us do not possess and which was probably general among prehistoric men and women.

There are other useful characteristics which have been inherited by individuals of to-day, but not all the traits which have come down as heritages are desirable. One of the latter is what is known as fear in the dark. It is true that children sometimes become afraid at night because of ghost stories told them by indiscreet elders at a time when their imaginations are less under their control than in later years. But fear in the dark, as a rule, is an inheritance from the dim past, when the inhabited world was a place of terror by night, when savage beasts of prey roamed everywhere and men and women were in fear, not only of these perils, but of human enemies at night, and every man feared his fellow man as a possible enemy.

Unless their imaginations are inflamed by weird stories of ghosts and evil things, the average child is no more afraid of the night than of the day. Yet there are individual cases of children who are born with a fear of night inherited from prehistoric ancestors. They are afraid to go out after nightfall unless accompanied by one of their elders, or sometimes by another child who has not inherited this fear. Sometimes this feeling wears away before the fear-stricken child reaches mature years, and in the case of ignorant people it often lasts all their lives. In the latter case popular superstitions are likely to keep the feeling alive.

John Barleycorn, Jr.

By Henry Payson Dowst

Introducing the latest member of the Barleycorn family, a little fellow of extraordinary high spirits. There are some of you that will enjoy meeting the newcomer

JOE DUNHAM came out of the justly esteemed West and made good in organic chemistry because he was a genius. Since leaving college he had worked in the laboratory of one of the great packing concerns, making synthetic flavoring extracts and bogus attar of violets from animal by-products. To him "a simple primrose on the river's brim" was merely a subtle and elusive perfume distilled from some part of an ox and sold in drug stores at two dollars an ounce.

Now, in Doctor Drinkwater's Bacteriological Studios, Joe led a delightful life among the bugs. The deadliest germs had no terrors for him. You have seen a bee keeper mingle socially with whole swarms of honey makers. Nothing he says or does seems to evoke what you might call a stern rejoinder. That was the way with Joe and the germs. He knew them all intimately, calling them informally by their first names. His world was a microcosm and himself a Zeus, from the Olympus of his tall stool hurling thunderbolts among the test tubes and laughing at the riot of the bacilli in some yeasty ferment. Through an omniscient eyepiece he peered down upon the antics of the atoms, magnifying their virtues as well as their faults and prying shamelessly into their domestic doings.

With Joe Dunham to New York came his younger brother Jack, to engage in the selling of furs or furnaces—let me see—something that has to do with keeping you warm. Oh, yes, thermometers. And not more reluctant was the mercury in the glass column in zero weather than was Jack Dunham to rise to the coaxing lure of the Big Town.

"I don't care for it," he said. "Too complicated and frenzied. Every one's crazy about roofs and cabarets and taxicabbing around spilling money. At home I could live on half what it costs here and have twice as good a time. There was the canoe club in summer, and the river in winter where you could skate without paying admission and being bumped by a lot of speed hounds. Besides, folks here drink too much. You drink too much, Joe. Foolish habit, costs a fortune. You better cut it out and start a bank account."

Joe laughed tolerantly. He took to the city and its ways much more readily than Jack. He belonged to a club and spent his evenings with the bunch. Jack eschewed the bunch and chewed the nourishing cud of solitude four or five nights a week in the three-room apartment which he and Joe shared in Fifty-fifth Street, just west of Eighth Avenue. Though a good salesman, his income did not equal Joe's. But he banked a definite amount every week, while Joe usually trod the crumbling edge of insolvency.

"I haven't any moral scruples about booze," argued Jack, "but why keep yourself broke buying drinks for a lot of guys who wouldn't chip in a five-dollar bill apiece to ship you home after you'd drunk yourself into a plank Prince Albert?"

"You don't know the bunch," defended Joe. "Most warm-hearted, open-handed fellows in the world. What do you want to be a croaker for? Regular old woman; registered member of the Amalgamated Association of Hardboiled Eggs. You save nickels and quarters at the expense of your girlish laughter, and some day when you have enough money to enjoy life, you'll be all out of practice."

"Go to it," said Jack. "Have a good time. You'll be like the grasshopper blowing around at the end of a perfect summer to board with the ant. If I hang onto my coin I may not know how to spend it, but I can keep you out of the poorhouse in your declining years."

"All right," agreed Joe. "That grasshopper part isn't so bad. Slip me a five till Saturday, will you?"

When America went to war, the brothers Dunham tried to enlist. Jack had weak arches and Joe's eyes were wrong six different ways. Without his spectacles, St. Patrick's Cathedral looked to him like a dancing dervish, and the Woolworth Building assumed the outlines of an irregular and wobbly corkscrew. You would never know this to look at him. Behind lenses, obviously convex, his eyes twinkled with alert good humor. And for close work they gave him no trouble.

Rejected for military service, Jack stopped selling thermometers and took a civilian job in the Q. M. department; and Joe stayed in the Drinkwater laboratories, where, after all, his talents were exceedingly valuable to the government; for is it not well known in the war department that important discoveries relative to the peculiar infections to which trench warfare exposes soldiers were made by Joe Dunham? Neither brother had cause to reproach himself for doing less than his best.

In spite of their diametrically opposite temperaments, Joe and Jack were extraordinarily fond of each other. Jack's thrift amused Joe. The elder brother had for years felt a definite responsibility for the younger. Now he saw him making good. He was pleased that Jack avoided dissipations.

"Kid," he said, "you may be a whale of a thermometer salesman, but you sure haven't a mercurial temperament."

"You don't know," rejoined Jack. "You don't know what's going on inside of me. You'd be surprised if I told you I was an example of calm self-repression. I have impulses under my belt that gnaw and burn like that Spartan boy when the fox chewed his vitals and he never peeped."

"You better see a doctor. Sounds like dyspepsia to me. A half teaspoonful of common baking soda with a little water at bedtime——"

"Aw, dry up. Some day you'll need a little sympathy."

But there was one taste shared by both brothers. Their preference in femininity was cut to the same pattern, and that pattern was Winnie Brush. Oh me, oh my! Some pattern!

Winnie lived far uptown. Coming out of the subway at One Hundred and Fifty-seventh Street and leaving the drug store on your starboard quarter, you bear due north up the slope of Broadway—what, didn't know Broadway got that far from Forty-second Street?—until you come to the street you seek and turn to the right. You keep on ascending, pass the peak of the rise, and dip to the eastward until you approach a section of the Grand Cañon and have to brace your feet to keep from slipping over the brink. Right here is an old, old provincial house of stately architecture, where Washington once had his headquarters—or was it the Prince of Wales or Mr. Bryan? And reared beside this well-preserved relic of a lamented past is an apartment building so many stories high that its relation to the wall of the cañon is as Ossa to Pelion and the dwellers therein may observe through binoculars the struggles of the McGravian warriors and their adversaries in the Polo Grounds far, far below.

Here, like an eaglet in an aerie, dwelt Winnie.

There is no need to explain how Joe and Jack met Winnie. Love will find its own level, even if it has to flow uphill.

The girl was what you might call, roughly speaking, an edible blonde. Her hair was pale yellow, like the batter for the griddle cakes just before mother starts dropping them on the smoking iron; and her eyes as brown as the same griddle cakes when they are ready for the butter. Of course butter wouldn't melt in Winnie's mouth, but the liquid melody of her voice was as sweet as the trickle of maple syrup—well, call it mapleine, if you want to be up-to-date in a day when most everything good to eat is listed as an *hors d'Hoover*.

Fresh, ripe strawberries were Winnie's lips —no, not the sandy little half-green nubbins like those you get in a January shortcake—and her teeth white as loaf suger. Rose petals and cream were in her cheeks——

Enough! Let it be clear that Winnie Brush's attractions shamed the menu all the way from cherrystones to check. She was no half portion, either.

Her father was a solitaire lizard who turned green every night when he read about fortunes made in Wall Street, and pink when Mrs. Brush said he mustn't cheat by playing the seven of clubs on the eight of spades if he wanted to go to the heaven of all Canfield addicts—two games won at a single sitting.

To show you, in a nutshell, what sort of

sport Papa Brush was, it is necessary only to say he had promised his wife every New Year for fifteen years that she and Winnie should have a limousine the following Christmas. That's how good he was to his family. Nothing small or mean about him. He would have matched promises gayly with Cecil Rhodes.

Since it is none of our business, let us obtrude a curious nose into the love-making methods of the Lochinvar brothers, Joe and Jack, riding out of the West, as stated in our opening paragraphs, and also riding upward, on separate nights, in the wrought-iron-and-plate-glass lift of the Ossapeltic Apartments.

When Joe called, Winnie, by previous arrangement, would have on the *crêpe de Chine* or the *peau de soie* or the unknown-purple batiste—you know—with her hair all fixed in a permanent wave. She need only wrap herself in a long, infolding cloak and give Joe the slippers to put in his side pocket. Then they would take the subway downtown as far as One Hundred and Thirty-seventh Street, in the neighborhood of which was the Airedon Roof. Here you could get a table d'hote with dancing. All you had to furnish was the girl and the rest was provided—dinner, music, lights, floor, cabaret, crowds, fun, laughter, and——

Winnie did not like the "and." She had no objection to the penful of writing fluid that was allowed with the dinner, just enough to figure a debit balance when the check was settled. But Joe had to go down to the telephone and call up a friend; or inquire from the management about a pair of gloves he had left; or something. Every time he did such an errand and returned, his eyes would shine a little brighter behind his thick lenses, his dancing would become a little less restrained, and his general atmosphere, not to say aura, would suggest more unescapably the perfume of juniper and orange peel.

Joe was always a gentleman, only he laughed a trifle louder than was necessary and grew pink under the eyes. When Winnie mentioned how late it was, and wouldn't they better be taking the subway uptown, Joe protested in a hurt tone that this was only the shank of the evening and you could go home when you couldn't go anywhere else, and oh, Winnie, be a sport, and please don't quit when things are just getting good.

Winnie worked in an office where she had never been beaten under the wire by the long, black finger of old Grandpop Time. Knowing she had to get up in good season next day, she usually had a little, half-irritating battle with Joe to get him started; and then he would insist on buying a taxi-cab just for those twenty-odd blocks they could as well traverse for a dime.

Headstrong, boyish, irresponsible, lovable Joe! Like a naughty boy, he needed, Winnie thought, to be slapped and then kissed. He was always entertaining, unhackneyed, stimulating. He had a big future, fame stored up and waiting, resources inexhaustible to supply everything his heart or the girl of his heart might desire—if——

And the heart of Winnie Brush desired many things. The annually dangled limousine whose ghostly honk mingled each January with the chime of future Christmas bells had its effect. To her, nice things, luxuries, seemed a birthright, long ago and without her consent liquidated into poverty stew. But if Joe Dunham were as clever as people said, he would surely compound the magic formula which should turn the base metal of his daily toil into double eagles. And he was such an amusing, companionable old dear—but——

Winnie was against alcohol. She sighed deeply when she thought of what it might do to a boy as brilliant as Joe Dunham.

And then she sighed about Jack.

He called at the Ossapeltic oftener than Joe. He could afford to, because he did not seem to think the cabaret route the directest way to Winnie's heart. But he always brought something—fruit, flowers, bonbons, books. He no more thought of entering the Ossapeltic lift empty-handed than if it had been a freight elevator. He gave Papa Brush two dandy packs of cards and Mother Brush a set of those dinky little cups and saucers with dragons on 'em that you get in the Chinese junk—bric-a-brac shops on Fifth Avenue.

Jack did not care for dancing, and liked his music à la carte, never forgetting to change the needle with each record. Winnie figured up that Jack had bought thirty-nine new pieces, including a vast repertory from the "Rigoletto" quartet right down to "Lead, Kindly Light," as sung by the Standard Oil Choir. He presented her with all the sure-fire hits as fast as the gutta percha got a purchase on them.

So, on the evenings Jack called, the Brush

family was in for an hour or two with our best composers and a little talk on the subject of quantity discounts on clinical thermometers in gross lots. As an entertainer, Jack was a peach of a salesman.

But in the eyes of Winnie, he possessed redeeming features. Among these were a mouth that never said a mean word about a soul, a nose above the sniff of suspicion, and a pair of eyes that looked at you with confident directness. His head, slightly protuberant above the ears and north of the coat collar, was filled with common-sense ideas and convictions touching on the earning powers of small but oft-repeated sums of money invested at four and one-half per cent. He wasn't brilliant, perhaps, but he was steady; and many a limousine has been overtaken by a fliv.

Then, too, Jack had as many kind thoughts as a linotype has letters. He was so clean and honest and frank that after he had spent an evening with you, you felt as if you had had a soul bath and could still smell the soap.

But you never sensed the delicate, exotic aroma of the *fleur de Bronx* or the spicy emanation of *lilium Tomcollensis*.

"And I'm no bigot, either," he asserted. "I'd drink if I wanted to. I just don't want to. I'd rather have the money. I don't tell the other fellow he shan't. That's his business. It's a matter of personal preference, like going to Coney Island or to hear Billy Sunday. I believe in letting people do as they like."

"Sue 'em quickly, as the old Romans used to say," agreed Papa Brush. "That's Latin for every one according to his lights, or how lit he is, as the case may be. I admire your broad-minded attitude, Jack. And any time your thirst gets a lead over your principles, I've got some very nice beer on the ice."

Another thing added to Winnie's perplexity. Joe proposed regularly once a week, but Jack had never said a word. Winnie made up her mind that until Jack had spoken, she couldn't think of accepting Joe. Sometimes she was a little fearful lest Joe's impetuosity might upset this resolution; but not if she could help it. If poor Jack had only a bit more jazz! His brother had too much, especially when he'd been downstairs to telephone the hospital about Bill—you know, the one with the missing appendix. The good news of Bill's rapid recovery cheered Joe up greatly by the time he got back from the caf—the telephone booth.

Actually, Winnie wondered if a couple of cocktails—just once, of course—wouldn't fan the divine spark in Jack and illuminate him enough so he could see his way clear to a declaration. She wanted to see him in action, for his own credit if nothing else.

And while she was waiting for the improbable to occur, Joe Dunham discovered The Ferment.

Do not ask too much about Joe's ferment, for it was a secret. In a general way you are aware that alcohol starts with a ferment and a ferment starts with a bug. The thing that leavens yeast bread is a bug—a bacillus, causing the dough to rise and wax puffed up and chesty. Another sort of bug exerts a similar influence upon the man who is given to making after-dinner speeches.

In a brewery the yeast bug finds his greatest field of usefulness. While the brew is working, he piles up mountains of froth and suds. Analogous mountains are piled up by the political microbe, working inside an aspirant for the job of county commissioner or alderman.

It is from ferments that hard liquors are distilled. Perhaps you will wish to continue the simile in the case of the politician, it being the habit of readers to rush in where authors never meant any such thing. Yet it is permissible to observe, in speaking of distillates in the same breath with candidates, that the liquor cheers the gang and the gang cheers the pol.

Joe Dunham, who thought he had a handshaking acquaintance with all the bacteria, was surprised when he ran across the little stranger.

"Pleased to meet you," he said. "Stopping in the city?"

Further acquaintance revealed startling traits in the newcomer. It multiplied with great rapidity. That is a funny thing about some baccili. One can settle down, keeping bachelors' hall, as it were, and raise a family. This new bug of Joe's was just such a self-starter. The system may seem an exaggerated form of individualism, though doubtless it has its compensations.

The chemist welcomed the alien which had thus evaded the immigration authorities and slipped past quarantine and gave it a nice home in a test tube, where, with a little encouragement, it set up housekeeping.

Shortly Joe obtained, with its assistance, a ferment of extraordinary vigor. Among other tests, he tried a distillate.

The result was a golden, opaline liquid that glowed in the vial with a sinister radiance that affected you uncannily, as when you look into the eyes of a caged tiger.

Cautiously, Joe continued his experiments, until he came to the guinea-pig test. You have heard what a drop of nicotine on the tongue of a cat will do? Something awful, take it from the physiology books. But a drop of Joe Dunham's new bug juice on the guinea pig's tongue produced a far different set of phenomena. Piggy developed a brannigan.

This puzzled Joe, because the distillate seemed to possess no characteristic of alcohol. It was noninflammable, slow to evaporate, absolutely tasteless and odorless. Yet the guinea pig went through all the successive stages of inebriety—extreme playfulness, followed by stupidity, exhaustion, and sleep. Furthermore, upon awakening, it appeared to feel exceedingly rocky, refused its breakfast, drank thirstily of plain water, and showed all the symptoms of genuine katzenjammer.

For a number of weeks Joe continued his experiments, and at the end of this time knew he had something for which the world would pay him millions. Three drops in a glass of water would make a plutocrat out of the most discouraged outcast. Added to the coffee of the dullest postprandial orator who ever bored a chamber of commerce, it transformed him into a Demosthenes. Joe tried it on one, and knew.

The distillate was the swirling essence of inspiration, encourager of the timid, magic quickener of sluggish wits.

Take the case of Gadger, who had never painted any except mediocre pictures. Joe dined with him at the club and, at an opportune moment, introduced three drops into the artist's demi-tasse. Presently Gadger's eye lighted strangely, his face flushed.

"I've got it," he cried abruptly, springing up. "I've got it. Excuse me, old top, but I'll have to go!"

With this he rushed madly away. Afterward the chemist learned that Gadger worked like a fiend all that night. The picture he turned out set the town by the ears within a fortnight.

Likely enough, you have your own opinion of Gadger and his one chef-d'œuvre, "The Piece of Cheese." Of course it made him, so that ever since he has been able to command good prices for the same mediocrities he formerly swapped for delicatessen. Perhaps it was delicatessen which furnished the *motif* for "The Piece of Cheese." But as for the inspiration, that came from John Barleycorn, Jr., as Dunham nicknamed his distillate. The truth will out.

The culture tube, containing the original and indispensable bug—the original bacillus and its multiplying family—Joe kept, carefully guarded and disguised by a label declaring it to be serum for horse colic. The tube was stopped with a wad of cotton and placed in a rack inside a cupboard carefully locked by the chemist each night.

Somewhere the father or the uncle or the brothers of John B., Jr., might be awaiting discovery and the cosy encouragement of a chemist's hospitality. So far as Joe knew, this single parent culture was the source from which must be bred all others of the same marvelous propensities.

Precious bug! Its progeny should outwit the schemers whose battle against the liberties of a hitherto free and pickled citizenry was even then on the verge of victory. Joe chuckled.

He was doing wonderful work in the laboratory, earning daily encomiums from his chief.

"And I see," said the good doctor, "you've cut out drink. That's wise. I was a bit worried about you. Not that you ever overdid it, but in a profession like ours, where exactness means so much and a mistake might cost many lives—I confess if it hadn't been for your unusual talents I should have been obliged to dismiss you."

Joe smiled. Sure, he had cut out liquor. Why drink, when he had John Barleycorn, Jr.? Every day he came to work with a headache and a fur-lined tongue; but a few drops of the distillate in water soon dispelled all that. It made him a superchemist, performing prodigies. Yet he knew he was bound to pay. Alcohol was bad enough, but J. B., Jr., was four times worse!

"A great genius," he was acclaimed by Doctor Drinkwater, and the clients of the Drinkwater Bacteriological Studios agreed.

But Joe knew the day of his success was not yet at hand: July 1, 1919, would see these United States a wide, hopeless land of universal thirst, unrelieved except by il-

licit cases in the cellars of private individuals. And these hoards would inevitably disappear under the jealous eyes of their owners. Some would touch bottom sooner than others. The time must come when every man's hand would be against his neighbor so long as one flask remained untouched and that neighbor was known to possess a thirst and a corkscrew.

Odorless, condensed, potent, easily concealed, John Barleycorn, Jr., would come into its own, subject to no existing prohibition of law. Joe Dunham pictured millionaires on his doorstep offering him the ransom of kings for a few vials of that magical essence. He would be rich.

He would buy Winnie Brush limousines —flocks of them, one to match each of her gowns. He wished he might reveal to her the secret of the wealth that was to be his; but caution hobbled his tongue. Yet in her eyes he gained favor by reason of his declared abstinence from liquor. It helped.

With Winnie Jack was still as reticent as ever. He was out of government service now and back in the thermometer business, which was picking up. With advancing prices Jack's commissions were fattening and his bank account following suit. He spoke of a salesmanagership. But except in the adoration of a lambent eye or the slight pressure of a hand when the elevator rattled upward in its grooves, he spoke not of love.

Still the cautious Winnie, plumbing her heart in vain for conclusive evidence of her real feelings, resisted the ardent advances of the chemist.

"Mercy!" she would say to herself. "I wonder if Joe has really quit drinking. He was awfully talky to-night! Seems as if he *must* have had a cocktail. Oh, dear! Wonder why Jack is so bashful."

It piqued her to feel that her charms were not enough to overcome even the stubbornest diffidence. And yet she could not give up the thought that, if Jack would bring himself to speak, she would then and there find the answer to her problem. Gee, girls, the suspense was fierce!

One evening the salesman stood before the mirror, fumbling with his tie.

"Joe," he said abruptly, "what you going to do after July first?"

"Nothing. What's July first to me?"

"You got a lot of stuff hid away some place?"

"Not a drop. I'm off it."

"No! Since when?"

"Some time. To tell the truth, Jack, if no more is to be had after July first except what you bum from your friends, a fellow might as well kiss it good-by. So I'm in training already."

"You make me tired, Joe. It's a wonder you booze-h'isters'd let yourselves be bossed by a lot of fanatics."

"That sounds funny, coming from a teetot——"

"I'm not a teetotaller, Joe Dunham, and don't you call me one. I never was. I always said I'd drink if I wanted to. I can regulate my own habits, but I decline to let any one else tell me what I shall eat or drink. I'm a free-born American citizen; I had two drinks yesterday!"

"Huh?" Joe's jaw dropped in amazement. This dynamic announcement of Jack's shocked him.

"I did," said the salesman. "I was tired. It's some job covering my trade, especially days I have to go to Brooklyn. Coming home I was reading the *Sun*, and there was a story about the last State ratifying this amendment thing. Say, Joe, I never wanted a drink before in my life. It came over me all of a sudden how tired I was, and maybe I needed a drink, and these self-appointed guardians of the public morals were fixing so I couldn't have it. I gotta right to it, I said. They make me good and sick, I said to myself. What's it to them, if I'm tired or something, and I want a drink? I'll say it makes me mad, Joe; *good* and mad."

"I shouldn't think ——"

"I suppose not. You rum hounds haven't been thinking. That isn't your long suit. You've gone and let 'em slip it over. You've been untrue to a sacred trust. We chaps that didn't want booze until the reformers said we mustn't left it to you souses to guard our interests. If those who love liquor wouldn't defend it as a precious heritage, who would, I ask you? You played us false. You slept on a listenin' post, and now we've *all* got to be shot at sunrise."

"That's the funniest logic I ever heard, Jack. You're crazy!"

"Nothing funny about it. Take it from me, Joe, I don't figure to let the Ancient and Horrible Order of Killjoys rob me of my rights as a free-born American citizen. Not any. I'm a living protest——"

Joe got out of the morris chair and approached Jack, sniffing as he came.

"John Davenport Dunham, brother of my soul, I believe you've got a bun this minute!"

"'S my own business," rejoined Jack. "What's more, I'm goin' out and spend the evenin' registerin' my opposition to a piece of malicious and destructive legislation. You better come too."

"Aren't you going up to see Winnie?"

"Not to-night. Winnie's aligned herself with the cohorts of oppression. I'm off the Brush family for some time—all except the old man. He's human."

"He'd be rich if he had let the rum alone all his life. And say, Jack, you'd better not monkey with it. It disturbs me to see you touch it——"

"Nice one to talk, you are. Little bit late to pull the elder-brother stuff, Jo-jo! I can take it or leave it alone. Left it alone all my life, now I'm going to take a little, just to show the white-ribbon contingent they can't boss me."

Truculently, the new apostle of freedom donned his hat and went out. Joe sat limply in his chair and listened to the thud-thud of Jack's hells. It couldn't be true! Great Scott! If the boy were as conscientious in registering his protest as he was in other ways, Joe shuddered to think of the result.

Late that night Jack returned. It was a wonder he ever found the door of his own apartment. Joe heard him fumbling for the keyhole and let him in. Jack would have pitched headlong had not his brother caught him.

"Showed 'em," he mumbled. "Showed 'em how free-born 'Merican cit'zen p'poses keep tyrant's heel offen neck of lib'ty-lovin' pipple. Had glor'ous fight 'th member Anti-S'loon Lig; got black eye, but's worth it. Other guy's in hosspistle."

Joe helped the apostle of freedom out of his clothes and into bed, afterward lying awake until dawn contemplating the possibilities. Of course, Jack was a rank amateur. Probably the painful morning ahead would show him that there was at least one sort of freedom not worth fighting for.

But this was only the beginning. Jack took to alcohol like a kitten to catnip, and performed with equal absurdity. He seemed to have the inherent temperament of the inebriate. And not only that, he was the peculiarly disagreeable type of dipsomaniac, irritable and quarrelsome.

"You'll lose Winnie," warned the chemist. "Some night you'll go up there jingled, and it'll be taps for yours."

"Thanks," said Jack ill-humoredly. "I'll manage my own love affairs. Good time for you to get busy. Lily-white birds like you have the call at the Ossapeltic."

This remark cut deep. It showed Joe the sinister effect of drink upon a nature like his brother's. The simple, unassuming, amiable young fellow had become quarrelsome and insulting. Furthermore, there was a note of truth in Jack's accusation. Joe knew the moment Winnie discovered Jack's dereliction, his own chances with her would soar. And because Joe was a good sport, he fought the impulse that would take advantage of his brother. He would not give up the hope that Jack would discover the silliness of his actions and climb back on the safe if slow-moving water wagon.

Then, too, Joe realized that he himself was not on the level. He was hitting John Barleycorn, Jr., daily, and the effect on his nerves and disposition was most distressing. Cold reason told him a habit like this was far worse than alcoholism. And it was such a habit he proposed to fasten upon the world. Didn't the poor old world have bad habits enough—morphine and cocaine and hashish and goodness knew what else?

The conclusion that Joe Dunham was no husband for Winnie Brush sat stubbornly in the consciousness of the chemist. Yet he had kept away from her, on Jack's account. He didn't want Winnie to question him about Jack. It was so much easier to stall over the phone, when Winnie's anxious inquiries reached him in the laboratory.

Because the thermometer salesman's surly, nagging mood had almost precipitated a fist fight, Joe now avoided him. There seemed to be no way in which he could help the misguided boy. Oh, hell! It was a rotten world!

But one day Jack telephoned his brother.

"Joe," he said, "I want to see you. Be around the rooms at supper time, will you?"

Wondering at the softened tone in Jack's voice, Joe went home early, stopping for various provisions on the way. When Jack showed up the chemist had a good supper ready.

"Hello, Patrick Henry," said Joe. "How's the apostle of liberty to-night?"

"I'm sick," said Jack. "I'm all in."

"What's the matter? Haven't got the flu?"

"No; it's mental."

"Have you managed to nip the iron-shod heel of tyranny in the bud? Or is it still brooding over the victims of its poisonous breath?'

"Aw, Jo-jo, quit kidding. Have a heart, will you? What do you think I did?"

"Got a skinful and addressed the liberty-loving citizenry from a soap box in Mad——"

"Don't, Joe. It's too serious. I went up to see Winnie."

"Soused?"

"To the ears."

"Too bad. You better lay off that stuff."

"I'm off—for the present. Haven't touched it in three days. Say, Joe, Winnie was fond of me; honest, she was. No girl would be so cruel to a chap unless she loved him. I went up there like a damn fool to show her I wasn't going to be bossed by any one, and in six minutes I got all that was coming to me. She'll never have anything to do with me again; and say, Joe, I can't live without her."

Joe wondered if Jack were the only one who couldn't live without Winnie. He poured out a plate of hot soup for Jack and burned his thumb, and the pain felt good, compared to the stab in his heart.

"Here," he said. "Have some of this. It's canned, but it's nourishing. It'll warm your insides better'n a drink."

Jack sipped gingerly.

"I don't know," he said. "I've lost Winnie; might as well drink myself to death."

It did not occur to Jack to ask Joe why he, too, did not eat.

"If Winnie'd marry you," said Joe, "would you be able to quit and let it alone the rest of your life?"

"Would I?" Jack turned a lugubrious face to his brother. "Don't be a fool. I was an ass ever to touch it."

"What makes you think she's fond of you?"

"The other night, she said so. She said all she'd been waiting for was for me to come to her and ask her. She said she loved me because she thought I was honest and earnest and good—and now I wasn't good any more and she supposed I never had been. She guessed I'd been a hypocrite all along."

"You go and see her to-night," said Joe. "She's a great girl."

Jack looked up with terror in his eyes.

"My God, Joe, I couldn't! I wouldn't dare!"

"You slip her a little bunk about how you were sick and only took a drink or two for medicine and it went to your head. Use your bean, Jack; she' just waiting for you to come and offer her some excuse she can accept. It won't make much diff——'

"No," said Jack. "Nothing doing. I haven't the courage of a rabbit."

"You'd make her happy, wouldn't you? You'd make her a good husband?"

"Joe, you know it! I've got five thousand dollars in the bank. I make good money, too; and I worship the ground she walks on."

"You're a fool, Jack. Go and let her see she can make a man of you. It's what half of 'em marry for; this is the psychological moment!"

Jack shook his head. His spirit was gone. For a solid hour Joe labored, but his brother was a sentimental coward.

"Go in my room," suddenly said Joe, "and get me a clean dish towel."

Jack amiably arose and obeyed. Joe wiped his soapy hands—he was washing the supper dishes—and produced from his pocket a tiny vial. From this he let three drops fall into Jack's unfinished coffee. When he recorked the bottle, the liquid swirled and glinted in the light, mocking at Joe from the prisoning cylinder.

As the chemist plunged his hands in the hot dishwater again, Jack returned.

"Drink your coffee, so I can wash the cup," he said.

Jack drained the cup, dropped it in the dish pan, and began to dry the dishes with the clean cloth.

"Darn," he said suddenly. "I don't feel so rotten. That soup and the coffee bucked me up a little."

"Sure," said Joe, emptying the pan. The water gurgled into the waste pipe. "You go to bed early and have a good sleep. By morning you'll feel fine."

"Bed nothing," cried Jack. "I'm going up to see Winnie. I'm going to take your advice, Joe. And by golly, I'm never going to touch booze again."

"But how about the tyrant's heel? Aren't you going to keep up the good fight

against the abridgement of our personal lib——"

"Oh, you go to the devil!" said Jack.

Joe Dunham, chemist, let himself into the Drinkwater laboratories half an hour later. Through the echoing hallway he walked by the light of a match to the door of his own workroom. The odor of miscellaneous chemicals hung heavily.

In the dark, he found the wall switch and turned on the light. Then, from a cupboard he took a tube, half full of a milky fluid. This he corked tightly and slipped into his pocket. He put out the light, felt his way again along the dark corridor, and left the building.

Forty minutes later he stood by the rail along the edge of the flagstone walk which skirted the brink of the Grand Cañon. Above him towered the walls of the Ossapeltic, story upon story. Joe looked up and saw, far aloft, the window of the Brush apartment. Papa Brush would be playing Canfield, slyly dropping the seven of hearts on the eight of diamonds, or putting over some such irregular maneuver, unless Mother Brush happened to be looking.

And in the parlor, with the lights turned low, his brother Jack, made into a sentimental giant, a wooer with the eloquence of a Romeo, was telling Winnie Brush, under the stimulus of John Barleycorn, Jr., how he had five thousand dollars in the bank, and was making a hundred a week and wasn't it strange what one or two drinks would do to a fellow who wasn't used to it?

All this was as plain to Joe as if he had been in the room. He looked off over the cañon, floored with a white mist through which a thousand street lamps in rows, some straight, some curved, shone up like an inverted firmament.

From his pocket he took the little vial of J. B., Jr., and with it the tube containing the mother culture of what would, if he choose, enrich him beyond all necessity and, at the same time, let a devil loose in the world. In the vial he could see the tawny liquid sparkle and beckon, sinister and uncanny, like the yellow light in the eyes of a caged tiger. Even now his system, attuned to the stuff, cried out for the alleviating drops.

If Joe ever needed alleviating, it was now.

Once more he turned and looked up at the lights in the Ossapeltic; and far above these, in a calm black sky, the stars looked down and gave back the image of those brighter stars that speckled the valley floor.

Joe faced the abyss and drew back his arm, then flung something forth into the night. It glinted, there in the shadows, like a little comet, and was gone. The sound of broken glass came tinkling back from the depths. The chemist threw again, and the mother culture of the woes that were not to be, followed the gittering course of its first born.

Then he turned and climbed the slope, past the Ossapeltic Apartments, over the crest, and descended to Broadway, where he took a subway train at One Hundred and Fifty-seventh Street, bound downtown.

BEATEN BY EVERYBODY

BEFORE the United States went to war with Germany, Representative J. Thomas Heflin of Alabama was the champion talker, chatterer, conversationalist, and gossiper of the national capital. After the beginning of hostilities, he addressed himself to the one topic and annexed the championship for predicting the triumphant part Uncle Sam would play in the fighting.

When the American troops began to drive the boches back to the Rhine, he rose to even greater heights and figured as a geyser of talk, words, metaphors, and exclamation—all jubilant.

"Well, Tom," Representative Rodenberg of Illinois greeted him one morning, "your predictions were right. The boche is getting an awful licking. Our boys and the Allies' boys are hammering the Huns to a fare-you-well!"

"An awful licking!" echoed Heflin. "I'll tell you what's a fact, Rody. The Germans, in the last three weeks, have been beaten by every American organization except the Colonial Dames!"

The Resurrection of the "Donegal"

By Frederick J. Jackson

Author of "His Aunt," Etc.

Along the coast the *Donegal* was known as an "old maid," which meant that she was cranky, especially in a seaway, and it was necessary to stow her cargo to a nice point of adjustment. This is an instance when the "old maid's" peculiarities were ignored

THE *Donegal* was a "double-ender," meaning, in Pacific-coast parlance, a lumber steamer which loaded cargo through both fore and aft hatches, with bridge and deck houses situated amidships. Also, the *Donegal* was known as an "old maid." This meant she was cranky, especially in a seaway, and it was necessary to stow her cargo to a nice point of adjustment in order to make her answer her helm with a reasonable degree of promptness.

Just now the *Donegal* was facing Humboldt Bar in a bad season to cross. It lacked three days of Christmas, and a southwester was brewing on the coast. Therefore, when Captain Larson arose at six-thirty in the morning, he glanced anxiously at the barometer. Nearly a point had it fallen during the night, an ominous portent. Obviously, it behooved him to supervise personally the loading of his erratic vessel. The dock superintendent and the head stevedore he could not trust. Speed was their motto, and their religion—if they had any. They were young men. And Captain Larson, an old, hard-shelled Scandinavian seaman, possessed not much faith in younger blood. Hugo Martin, his first officer, was twenty-eight years of age. This was damning in the eyes of his superior, despite the fact that Martin carried a master's ticket. Grudgingly, even to himself, would the captain admit that Martin was a capable mariner and wise beyond his years in knowledge of the sea. He overlooked no chance of belittling the younger man.

Hurriedly clothing himself, Captain Larson stepped out of his room. It was his amiable intention to finish breakfast before his first officer, and then chide him for not being on the job. But Larson slipped on the frost-encrusted deck, and fell heavily. The brass doorstep caught him across the spine. A moan of pain issued from his lips as he endeavored to regain his feet. Then came the sickening realization that his lower limbs were paralyzed.

Hugo Martin, aware of the little game the skipper was wont to play each morning, and in rare good humor at having beaten his captain to breakfast by fifteen minutes, came blithely up the companionway from the dining salon at that moment.

Unaware of the cause, but seeing the plight of his superior, he lifted the stricken man into his berth. Half an hour later, in defiance of Larson's orders, he went ashore to the mill office and telephoned to the Marine Hospital for an ambulance. At nine o'clock, in anxiety as to the condition of the old Scandinavian, whom he really liked, he left the *Donegal* in charge of Mr. Coakley, the second officer, and called at the hospital. A surgeon informed him that the captain's injury was serious; he would not be able to walk for at least a month.

The main office of Page & Erickson, owners of the *Donegal*, was in San Francisco. By telegraph Mr. Martin informed them of the prostration of Captain Larson, then waited at the office for a reply. Back came a wire, signed by Dingwell, the company's general manager, instructing Mr. Martin to assume command of the steamer until its arrival in San Francisco.

Thereupon Captain Martin hastened around to the customhouse to complete the formalities of taking over the vessel. Here a delay ensued, caused by the absence of the collector, and it was not until noon that Martin arrived at the dock.

His first impression was one of agreeable surprise that the loading of the *Donegal* had progressed so rapidly. Already the deck was piled high with lumber, both fore and aft. But his exultation quickly died as he looked at the numerals of the load

marks. He nearly wept in his emotion at some one's stupidity, for the vessel was down almost a foot at the bow. Calling the head stevedore, he proceeded to render an inspired and profane version of the riot act.

"What in the Turk-headed name of a sacred plimsol mark have you hemstitched bunch of shoe clerks been trying to do?" he demanded heatedly. These are not his exact words.

"Keep your shirt on," was the flippant reply. "We were trying to get your worm-eaten wooden bucket clear of the dock this afternoon, so's that lime-juice tramp can warp in. She's gonna put on a night shift the minute you pull out. I was following orders to get you out in record time."

"I give orders now!" said the new captain emphatically. "Do you see she's 'way down by the head? What in Halifax have you loaded her with for'ard?"

"Clear redwood, sir!" The stevedore paid tribute to Martin's promotion. "The for'ard winches could snake it aboard as fast as the trucks brought it from the mill. We sure did pour it aboard!"

"Butt-log redwood in the fore hold!" Captain Martin uttered a fervent prayer. "And what did you farmers plant in the after hold before you started on the deck load?"

"Kiln-dried shingles, sir."

"Kiln-dried shingles!" wailed Martin in despair. "Sweet lollypops! I'll be jiggered if I'll risk losing my first ship by taking her out of Humboldt Bay when she's down by the head, and a sou'wester blowing up. The *Donegal* is a lunatic; she steers like the wrath of the gods even when we handle her loading with a surveying instrument."

"Afraid we can't take the time to shift her cargo, sir. Orders are strict to get her clear this afternoon. Besides, the second mate didn't object to the way we jammed the lumber aboard. He said we were doing fine."

"Where in blazes is Mr. Coakley? He isn't in sight."

"Come to think of it, he ain't been on deck for an hour."

Blood in his eye, Captain Martin raced up the gangplank. He discovered Coakley in his berth, dead to the world. The second officer lay breathing stertorously, an empty whisky bottle clasped fondly to his breast.

Breathing even more heavily than Mr. Coakley, Captain Martin rang for a steward. "Sling that piece of irresponsibility onto the wharf!" he ordered. "Dump him ashore together with his dunnage!"

Then he went on deck, determined to make the best he could of a situation which was covering his brow with cold perspiration.

"'Vast heavin'!" he shouted to the winch drivers. "All hands stand by to swing ship."

The stern lines were cast off. The tide caught the steamer, swinging her stern away from the wharf and out into the stream. When she had completed the semi-circle and her quarter again lay adjacent to the dock, the vessel was hauled ahead into her former berth so that she lay with her bow where the stern had been. Now that the position of the steamer had been reversed, the water-soaked clear redwood timber would be loaded aft, while light, well-seasoned piling and telegraph poles would complete the forward deckload.

Going ashore again, Captain Martin telephoned for two new officers to be signed on. Returning, he watched hopefully to note the effect of the change in the loading. Gradually the stern sank deeper. In the middle of the afternoon, with the cargo nearly all aboard, the excess draft at the bow had been reduced to less than six inches. It helped, but it was not enough. He was worried.

II.

A clerk from the mill office came running down the dock. "The captain is wanted on the telephone," he announced to Martin.

"Who wants me?"

"It's Miss Page, the owner's daughter. She wishes to know when you'll be ready to sail."

"Tell her I'm too busy to come to the telephone, and say that we sail some time after four-thirty. I guess she wishes me to take a package of Christmas presents down to her family. Tell her to send them right along."

A little later, Martin entered the captain's quarters, to which his belongings had been transferred, and looked at the barometer. It was still falling, little by little. He tapped the glass with his knuckles. Instead of the slight jump upward that he hoped for, the indicator dropped another

decimal part of an inch. Martin groaned, and the lines of anxiety deepened on his brow. For eighteen months, he had sailed as first officer of the *Donegal;* he knew her vagaries, her trickiness, her faithless tendency to disregard her helm if she were not humored. Under propitious circumstances in the matter of weather, taking the *Donegal* out of port when she was badly trimmed was a task calculated to multiply the gray hairs of an older and more experienced seaman than Captain Martin. But now, loaded wrong, and with a southwesterly gale beginning to roar up the northern California coast ——

He was interrupted by the local adjuster for a maritime insurance company, a retired sea captain, now brought to the dock by the news of Captain Larson's accident. With a keen eye he noted the freeboard of the *Donegal.*

"Bad adjustment of cargo," he announced, "very bad—for the *Donegal.*"

"Tell me something I don't know!" grunted Martin. "That pimple-faced head stevedore balled things up trying to stand in right with the mill superintendent. And Coakley got tanked to the scuppers with stuff that I would use to mix paint with; I had to fire him. Some people might think I'm lucky to get command of this vessel. *I don't!* Not under the circumstances."

"A mean pup is the *Donegal,*" declared the agent. "Well do I know her, for I was master on her for three years when she was new. Unless that cargo is shifted I'll have to cancel the underwriting."

"I'll take it up with the owners," said Martin. "I'll explain the situation to Dingwell by long-distance telephone, and inform him that it's absolutely necessary to remain in port until to-morrow. By that time we can get the cargo adjusted."

"Dingwell, bah!" spoke the agent in disgust. "Well, good luck to you, my boy. If you want me I'll be in my office."

After a slight delay, Martin got into communication with the San Francisco office. The general manager was on the wire.

"This is Captain Martin of the *Donegal.*"

"Yes, what's the trouble?" snapped the other. "You ought to be at sea by this time."

"I want authority to hold the vessel in port until to-morrow."

"Got the cargo aboard?"

"Yes, but——"

"Boiler trouble, or anything?"

"No, but the vessel isn't trimmed right. She isn't seaworthy. She's down several inches by the head; and the agent knows her so well that he refuses insurance."

"We'll take care of the insurance. I want the *Donegal* across the bar before it gets dark!"

"But I insist that it's dangerous to proceed on the voyage until the cargo is shifted. You know the weather report. We'll be bucking a hurricane when we reach Mendocino."

"Why tell *me* about that?" was the testy reply. "The *Donegal* as well as our other vessels have been down a little by the head before, and the other skippers never yapped about it. They took their vessels to sea—as they are paid to do. I suspect the trouble with you, Martin, is that you have a rich streak of pure saffron that extends from your back collar button to your belt. If you're afraid to take the *Donegal* out, then I can easily get some one who isn't. There are plenty of good skippers in Eureka who are yelling for jobs. You get to sea without any more delay or monkey business, or you'll find yourself on the waiting list of the Pacific Coast Exchange. Get me?"

Martin got him. Choking back his wrath, he replied:

"The *Donegal* goes to sea as soon as the chain lashings are on the deckload. *Good-by!*" He slammed the receiver back onto the hook. "And the blood is all over your fat head!" he added.

He started back toward the ship.

"Obey orders, even though you bankrupt owners," is an unwritten law of the sea. Dingwell's arbitrary order was unwise, Martin knew it. He also knew Dingwell for what he was: a man possessed of enormous self-conceit. A man with no knowledge of seamanship; to whom the element of personal danger on a winter ocean was unknown. A good business man, undoubtedly; an office-chair manager who had made a reputation by running his steamers as though he were operating a fleet of motor trucks.

It was not of risk to his own skin that Martin was thinking; it was of the financial condition of Page & Erickson. The latter was the junior partner, owning twenty per cent of the company, but he had argued Page into placing Dingwell as general manager. Under Dingwell's control

they had expanded on a scale heretofore unknown to small shipping companies. And Dingwell, a small-time financial genius, was carrying it through on a shoe string. So far all had gone well, but a mishap such as the loss of a ship would put the company in the position of having bitten off much more than it could chew.

As he walked toward the steamer, Martin seethed with cold rage. His faithfulness to Page and Erickson and his own knowledge that Dingwell in sheer ignorance was endangering twenty-seven lives as well as ship and cargo caused him to wish for nothing more than to have the general manager's fat neck between his fingers.

But Martin was paid to obey orders, fatheaded or otherwise. To fail to obey them meant the loss of his job. The stigma of cowardice would be attached to his name. Except in a subordinate capacity, the sea as a means of livelihood in the future would be closed to him. Further, if he refused to take the *Donegal* out of port, some other skipper would take her, a stranger, the chances were, one not experienced in the erratic moods of the steamer. Better that he himself should command the "old maid."

But the gods, with tongues in their cheeks, had worse still in store for untried Captain Martin, choosing Dorothy Page, the apple of her father's eye, as their instrument. She had been visiting her aunt in Eureka, and expected to journey south on the *Donegal* this trip in order to be at home before Christmas. The *Donegal* carried no passenger license, but two spare staterooms had been fitted up for the use of the owners or any member of their families whenever they chose to travel by water.

Dorothy Page and her impedimenta disembarked from a cab at the steamer's side while Captain Martin was engaged in his pleasant telephone conference with Mr. Dingwell. The steward obsequiously hastened down the gangplank to carry her baggage.

"Is Captain Larson aboard?" she inquired.

"No, miss. He's ashore in the hospital, and Captain Martin is now in command. He went uptown a few minutes ago."

The girl smiled to herself. For some unaccountable reason she was extremely glad to hear of Hugo Martin's promotion. Her acquaintance with him dated back some fifteen months, when she had first traveled to Eureka on the *Donegal*. She had liked his manner of polite, dignified deference toward her. Twice, since, had she made round trips on the steamer, and had gone out of her way several times to force him into conversations on the bridge or at the dining table. He liked her—trust the woman of her to know that—but he had seemed rather to avoid her than to make the slightest attempt at bridging the gulf between them. Therefore, he aroused her curiosity. After arranging her things in the stateroom, she stepped out on deck to await his arrival.

Numerous were the admiring glances cast her way by the sailors and the loungers on the wharf as she stood with the gale whipping her dress. She wore a heavy plaid sport coat, a fur, and a close-fitting little hat that needed no pins to hold it on in the face of the ravishing wind. In age she was perhaps twenty-four. Red-cheeked, dimpled, firm-chinned, she was good to look upon.

A scowl upon his face, young Martin came striding down the wharf and up the gangplank.

"How do you do, Captain Martin," she smiled, holding out her hand in frank heartiness. "May I congratulate you upon your promotion?"

"Certainly you may, Miss Page, and thank you," he replied, the storm within him suddenly passing away under the spell of her exuberant charm.

"They told me it would be very rough tonight, but I shall feel perfectly safe when you are in command. And I shall be your mascot on your first trip as captain."

His manner changed. The scowl returned, deeper than ever.

"Miss Page," he said reluctantly, "I don't dare to take you along this trip. Mr. Dingwell has given me emphatic orders to cross the bar before evening, but my judgment tells me that the *Donegal* is not entirely safe. The cargo is stowed wrong. You *must* not come."

"Must not!" Her sapphire eyes grew a trifle frosty. "You're perfectly horrid to speak to me that way. Father expects me home for Christmas, and this is the only steamer that will get me there in time. I'm going with you no matter what you say. There is no other way of traveling home. I can't go overland, for the roads won't be open again until spring. I refuse to leave the steamer."

Martin considered. He knew the truth of her statement. In the railroad being built to connect Eureka with San Francisco was an uncompleted section of eighty miles. During the summer, passengers were transported over this gap in automobile stages. But the road lay through a wild, chaotic mountain region, impassable in winter. Bridges were washed out, for in the rainy season all creeks and rivers were over their banks. The roads, too, in many places were entirely obliterated by slides.

Again he endeavored to dissuade the girl, but she was firm.

"*You* are going on the steamer, aren't you?" she inquired finally.

"Yes," he admitted.

"Then *I'm* going, too!" was her ultimatum.

"You're taking advantage of being the owner's daughter!" he informed her bluntly. "If you insist on coming, I disclaim all responsibility. You refuse to heed my warning." With that, ruffled young Captain Martin went about the ship's business, pointedly ignoring her presence.

By this time the steamer was ready for sea. The chain lashings were on the deckload, and the turnbuckles on these would be given their final tautening as the vessel steamed down the bay. The lines were hauled in, and the voyage of the *Donegal* began.

III.

When the red conical buoy between Samoa and the Bayside Mill was passed, and the steamer straightened out for the long reach down the main channel, Martin felt better. The *Donegal* was belying her reputation of crankiness when down by the bow. But deep in his heart remained a fear that she would be up to her ancient tricks when she arrived in broken water. A mile farther down the channel, and he saw acres of white water far ahead on the port bow, where the swells rolled in through the entrance and broke in the middle of the bay on the sand bars that lay between the life-saving station on the north spit and the white-washed railroad bridge that crossed the mouth of Elk River.

He gave orders for everything to be battened down in preparation for the travail of crossing Humboldt Bar. Two sailors on the forecastle head caught his eye. They were soldiering on a petty job.

"Mr. Eliason," he bellowed out to the first officer, who was forward, "kindly inject a little violet water, or something, into those two elegant, rough-necked gentlemen of leisure!"

Shouting into the teeth of the wind that swept over the top of the weather canvas around the bridge, he did not see the approach of Miss Page until the second officer told him that she wished to speak to him. She stood part way up the iron ladder, the wind whipping her skirts and her coat about her body.

"May I come up on the bridge?" she asked, raising her voice to make it heard above the whine of the gale.

"No!" His tone was gruff, unfriendly. "I just gave orders for the steward to lock you in your room before we start to cross out."

She grimaced. Plainly, she was down in Martin's bad books.

"Please, can't I come up?" she coaxed. "I'll feel safer on the bridge. If I'm locked in my room I'll feel *so* frightened. I'll scream all the time, and then, too, I'm liable to faint." She gave him a frank smile as if to say, "But you know me better than that."

Martin grinned involuntarily. A statute exists prohibiting passengers on the navigating bridge, but minor government regulations are often treated with great laxity on lumber steamers.

"Come up!" he said grudgingly. "I'll send for some oilskins that you can wear."

Swearing softly under his breath in resentment because he was as wax in her hands, he stalked to the other end of the bridge, just as Mr. Eliason came running up the ladder.

"Why does he want me to wear oilskins?" she inquired naïvely, turning to the mate. "Is it going to rain?"

The first officer glanced at the sky. "Not till it comes dark. But out between the jetties you're liable to be thinking that the whole Pacific Ocean is trying to climb aboard. Rain will be mild to what we're in for there. Dirty bar to-day, and it'll be worse to-night," he prophesied.

As they neared the entrance the steamer, in acknowledgment of the first swell, gave a slight pitch forward.

"Pooh! This is nothing!" Dorothy scoffed, as Mr. Eliason assisted her into a

cumbersome yellow oilskin coat that dragged on the bridge as she walked.

"Correct. But see that!" He pointed to the west, across the sand dunes, where columns of spray leaped high as waves rolled along the breakwater. "Look clear across to the south jetty. It's getting a terrific battering."

"Um-m," she said soberly. "That looks a bit more exciting."

"It will be!" he assured her grimly.

The steamer approached a black can buoy, then turned out toward the bar.

"A quarter less six!" sang out a sailor, heaving the lead.

Captain Martin, who had been sulking at the far end of the bridge, walked amidships.

"Another point south!" he ordered, through the wheelhouse scuttle.

"A point south!" echoed one of the helmsmen. Steam steering apparatus was a scorned luxury on lumber vessels; therefore a double watch was at the wheel, in anticipation of rough weather.

The bow of the *Donegal* dipped deeper into the dirty green water of the next oncoming wave. Mist and spray from the maelstrom across the distant south jetty began to blow over them. A few minutes later, on what is known as the "middle ground," as the steamer slid down the long, smooth, foam-flecked slope of a huge swell, an enormous quartering sea, coming through a break in the south jetty, towered high over the bow, and broke. The vessel shivered under the crushing blow, hesitated, then swung abruptly off to starboard, heading almost directly for the jetty on the north spit.

"Starboard! Hard over!" yelled Martin, his sea boots thumping hollowly on the bridge. In the misleading and contrary terms that have existed from the ancient days when ships were steered by means of a tiller, this order meant to turn the wheel to port. Frantically labored the two sailors at the helm, spinning the wheel until it would go no farther. A sudden intensified vibration ran through the steamer, caused by the racing engines as the stern lifted high and the propeller spun in the air.

"Good God!" whispered Martin under his breath, as the stern settled, and the *Donegal* refused to answer her rudder. Crazily, the steamer poked her nose upward as she arose quarteringly to another mountainous swell, then down, down, down to the bottom of the valley between the seas. Martin hastily reached for the engine-room indicator, to signal full speed astern. The jagged rocks of the jetty were all too near.

Thump! came a jar that almost threw the people on the bridge off their feet. The steamer shook in every timber, shuddered again, and lost headway. Arising to the impulse of the next oncoming sea, she suddenly responded to her helm.

"A half five!" came the bass of the lead heaver against the wind.

Martin drew the first free breath in half a minute.

"As she heads!" he ordered the steersmen, then turned to the mate.

"Tin-canned dogs!" he exclaimed, "did you ever see a contrary corkscrew like the *Donegal*? First she refuses to answer when she has plenty of steerageway on, and then comes around like a little lady when she's almost at a standstill."

"Yeh!" grinned the mate, "but it took a spank on her bottom to make her straighten up. I wonder"—his manner turned to gloom—"how many seams she strained when she hit the bar."

"Don't care," said Martin. "It kept us off the jetty. Better run down and see how much she shows in the well."

He had been looking through and past the girl, ignoring her presence. When the mate left the bridge, he turned to her.

"Sit in that corner. You'll be safe there."

"Wuff!" mimicked Dorothy, refusing to take his anger seriously. "Please don't bite me." Nevertheless, she immediately obeyed his order.

Martin walked away, partly to hide the sheepish smile that her manner brought to his face. It was a hard job, he found, to hold resentment against a girl like her.

Fifteen minutes later the immediate danger was over; the bar had been crossed. Swinging around the whistling buoy, the *Donegal* headed to the southward.

Dinner that evening was a catch-as-catch-can affair. Leaving the bridge for a minute in charge of the second officer, he assisted the girl down into the dining room, treating her, however, as though he were escorting a total stranger. Seating her at the left of the first officer, and opposite the chief engineer, the only other cabin diner, he re-

turned to the deck. Not a word did he say in acknowledgment of her thanks.

"Isn't he going to have dinner?" she questioned the mate.

"No; he'll likely be on the bridge all night. I hear this is his first trip as master, and he's as nervous as a cat in a bucket of tar. The steward will bring up coffee to him once in a while."

Abruptly she broke off the conversation, suddenly thankful that the dining chairs were screwed onto the floor. The steamer had given a heavy lurch that sent dishes flying, in spite of the fiddles on the table. The extreme angle of the vessel gave the girl a momentary impression of lying in a reclining chair as she clung to the woodwork. The displaced dishes struck the wall, then clattered to the floor.

Simultaneously, a crash sounded from the forward deck, the jar and shock of something tearing loose, a rending, smashing, falling that reminded her of the nightmare she had spent in the early morning hours of the San Francisco earthquake.

The first officer sprang to his feet at the crash, clambered, catlike, up the tilted floor to the companionway, and disappeared, followed by the chief engineer.

IV.

Dorothy Page was a good sailor and without fear. The crash did not unduly alarm her. Rather, she was curious. The engines were still running, as she knew by the vibration, and the angle of the deck lessened. The pasty-faced steward, whiter than usual through a slight attack of seasickness combined with fear, entered to take her order.

"What was the frightful noise—a moment ago?" she inquired.

"I'm afraid the for'ard deckload shifted, miss. This is the worst trip I've ever been on. Most of the soup was spilled from the kettle as we crossed the bar, and that last heavy roll got away with some more, but there's still a little left. Would you care for some?"

"Yes, if you'll bring it in a cup. Safety first!"

Had she known of the menace added to the voyage by the shifting of the deckload, it is to be doubted if she would have partaken of the meal with the heartiness that she did. The sting of the salt-laden breeze had given her a splendid appetite.

She was half through her meal when the officers returned. Their faces were serious, but they made no comment. The meal over, she managed to climb to the deck and make her way along the wet planks to her room, buffeted at every step by terrific blasts of wind. The cabin door was exceedingly hard to open. She managed to pull it out, however, and step part way into the room. Then the wind pressure slammed the portal, throwing her violently against the upper berth as the steamer rolled to the opposite side.

A little later, after she had regained her breath, her thoughts turned to the man who intended to remain on the bridge throughout the night. Opening her suit case she removed a thermos bottle filled with hot chocolate. This she placed between the pillow and the wall, then adjusted the light and lay down in the upper berth to read. But she was tired, having danced the greater part of the night before, and, presently, the magazine slipped from her hand as the motion of the steamer lulled her into slumber.

Through the first half of the night the *Donegal* literally fought her way to the south, handicapped by the heavy list caused by the shifting deckload. In the engine room the chief engineer himself stood at the levers, endeavoring to control the stress on his engines when the propeller raced. Forward, the stout chains holding the high deckload in place were straining to the snapping point as they bore the weight of the timbers that had bulged over the rail. On the bridge, alternately facing the wind above the weather canvas and then giving orders to the double watch at the wheel, stood Captain Martin, his eyes severely inflamed by the stinging wind and salt.

At midnight, when the starboard watch was relieved, it began to rain, a blinding downpour that drove in sheets and gusts on the wings of the gale, rendering blackly impenetrable the path ahead.

The second officer went below when oilskin-clad Mr. Eliason appeared on the bridge.

"*Some* night, sir!" bawled the latter into Martin's ear. "Lucky if we sight the lightship."

"Blamed lucky if we can hang on this course," grunted the captain. "Something's going to happen again—we can't go on forever this way. I'm afraid she'll fall off into the trough every time she gets battered."

"Why not cut the for'ard chain lashings?" suggested the mate. "We may have to, if it gets worse. She'll ride sweet and dry if she's lighter for'ard."

"Sure death to the man who cuts the lashings; that load would go like a log jam breaking up. I'd try to ride out the night with the stern to the sea, but I'm afraid to risk getting into the trough when we swing. This moonstruck craft, with the bad list she's got, would probably want to stay down. Only a fortune teller can tell what she'll do next. In the trough she'd be overwhelmed; this sea would smash everything; the boats would go! Man, I can't risk it!"

Then the rain squall ceased as suddenly as it had come.

Straight ahead, less than a mile away, dipping and swinging as it showed through gaps in the spume, was a white light.

"The lightship!" ejaculated Martin. "Holy mother! What a relief!" He looked at the compass, then swore thankfully. "One hour more of rain," he commented, "and we'd have been on the rocks. By my reckoning we should have been three miles farther out to sea than we are. Our leeway must be more than one in four with this list, and that's an unheard-of ratio.

"Sou'-sou'west, half west!" he ordered the helmsmen, and the instructions were echoed back from the wheelhouse.

"Got to give her a wide berth," he vouchsafed to the mate. "She's been holding up all right with the sea on the starboard bow. This will put her right into the wind. It's time to start praying that we don't fall off to starboard."

The Blunt's Reef lightship marks the seaward limit of the rocks that extend west of Cape Mendocino. The latter is the most westerly point in the United States. Below it the coast slants away at an angle to the eastward.

When the lightship had been left some distance astern, Captain Martin changed the course to due south. This brought wind and sea again on the starboard bow, and he felt relieved. Through some vagary the *Donegal* seemed to ride easier in this way and showed less tendency to fall off.

At four bells in the morning the men at the wheel were relieved. Their quarters were directly beneath the wheelhouse. This obviated the dangerous trip over the wave-swept forward deckload, which would have been the case if the forecastle were beneath the bow. This use of a word may be a bit confusing, but there is a difference between "forecastle" and the "forecastle-head."

At two-thirty the second officer returned to the bridge, his wet oilskins glistening, wraithlike, as he passed the dim light of the binnacle.

"Hanged if I could sleep, sir," he bellowed to Martin. "Was too restless. I have a hunch that all hell will break loose before morning."

The captain, who could have slept soundly had any opportunity been offered him, regarded his subordinate wrathfully.

"Sweet bells of Hades!" he returned. "Some fools don't know when they're well off!"

As if the coming of the second officer were a signal, the steamer began to make harder weather of it. Mountainous seas pounded her like reincarnated Titans seeking to destroy this puny toy of wood and iron that dared defy them. But she shook off the seas and struggled on. The *Donegal* was stanch. Granting that nothing unforeseen occurred, she would weather the storm. But the lines had deepened in Captain Martin's face. Constantly in his heart, consuming his nervous energy like a red-hot coal, was the haunting fear that the badly loaded, crippled steamer would suddenly prove true to her reputation, and trick him.

By three o'clock Cape Mendocino was miles astern and Punta Gorda with its jagged rocks and cliffs lay somewhere to the northeast. The wind lessened slightly, and Martin's anxiety slipped back a notch from its high tension. But the smashing seas were still tumbling aboard. At times the water was high enough on the deck below the bridge to trickle in through the cracks of the stateroom doors.

The swash of the water on the floor of her room and a semifloating stool that banged back and forth between the wall and the lower berth awakened Dorothy Page from her slumbers. To her surprise, she noted that the electric light was still burning. Looking at her wrist watch, she arose, stepped bravely into the cold water on the floor of the room, and donned the oilskin coat and hat, buttoning the strap of the latter beneath her chin. The thermos bottle fitted into a capacious side pocket of the coat. Awaiting a lull, she seized an op-

portunity to gain the deck. As she stepped outside, the gale swooped down with renewed fury; it tore the doorknob from her fingers and banged the door shut behind her with a noise like a gunshot. Overhead, the sky blazed spasmodically with lightning.

Halfway to the bridge she fought her way, and had gained the shelter from the wind between the towering deckload on one side and the housing on the other. Then a thundering sea came pouring aft over the deckload. A solid torrent of water cascaded into the alleyway. Stopping, she clung to the handrail, endeavoring to resist the pressure of the flood that engulfed her. Icy, devilish fingers pulled at her; an irresistible force dragged her feet from the deck. Her grip was weakening on the handrail, her senses fast slipping away, when some one caught her by the waist.

"Steady!" It was Captain Martin's voice. "You're all right now."

He carried her up onto the bridge and placed her in a corner behind the weather canvas where she was sheltered from the wind.

"You ought to know better than to come on deck in such weather!" he scolded gruffly. "What was the idea?"

For reply she held up the thermos bottle. "I—I was bringing this to you," she gasped, endeavoring to cough up some salt water.

"To me! Well, I'll be damned!" was the ungentlemanly remark he uttered in his surprise. Then he stooped, picked her up in his arms, and kissed her on the cheek before placing her back in the spot of shelter.

"I didn't bring *that* to you!" she declared indignantly, her cheeks burning as she tried to analyze her mingled emotions.

"I couldn't refrain from expressing myself," he returned. "You can call it a kiss of gratitude, and let it go at that. A hot drink!" He turned his attention to the chocolate. "That cowardly steward has forsaken me. I've had no coffee since midnight." He unscrewed the cap and eagerly gulped the scalding contents directly from the bottle.

"Hold fast!" The mate's sudden warning crescendoed to a shriek.

Blacker even than the sky a monster sea loomed over the starboard bow. Tons of water by the hundred crashed down as the wave broke. Under the blow the stricken steamer heeled far to port. From forward came the snap of breaking chains. Martin seized the girl in his arms, and held on. The weather canvas gave way under the pressure of the water; the flood poured roaring over the bridge, and passed aft. Further crashes told of the destruction in its course.

"Both boats gone, sir!" shouted Mr. Eliason. "Starboard one is smashed out of the davits. It's hogged badly. Port boat is stove in."

Martin's reply was short and far from sweet.

"This is no place for you," he informed Dorothy. "I'm taking you below. The deckload's gone, which is a blessing."

"Wheelhouse flooded, sir!" came a wail of grief from one of the helmsmen.

Still holding the girl, Martin crossed the bridge and looked below. Five panes of glass had been broken by the sea. The sailor was opening a side door to allow the water to run out.

Immediately several slight shocks followed from astern, different from anything else that had occurred. They felt the intense vibration of racing engines. This ceased; then a shrill blast sounded from the engine-room speaking tube.

Martin picked up the mouthpiece. "Yes?" he spoke into it.

"Propeller blades all gone, or the shaft is broken!" was the dire announcement. 'Did the for'ard deckload go?"

"It did!" laconically answered Martin.

"Then the blades kicked off on the floating timbers. From now on it's strictly up to you."

"All right; keep up steam for the pumps."

The *Donegal,* losing headway, had fallen off into the trough, rolling at a perilous angle with each sweeping wave. The bridge was dry, however, except for spray. Both officers drew near Martin, awaiting his decision.

"Get a piece of canvas into the forerigging!" he barked out. "There's a staysail in the after lazarette. Captain Larson got it from a schooner, to make hammocks for his kids, but it's just what we need now. Break out some of that new two-and-a-half-inch line for a halliard, and sling a block in the fore ratlines. *Anything!* But get it up. We haven't time to rig a sea anchor."

Nor was it a time for a sea anchor, which

would at best only postpone their destruction. A sail would enable them to round Mendocino, where, if they were driven ashore, was a stretch of beach that would give them a chance for their lives. To go on the cliffs south of the cape meant certain death.

"I'll have the canvas aloft in a jiffy, sir," replied the second officer, though this job was within the province of Mr. Eliason.

Accompanied by the latter he left the bridge. Martin started to order the first officer to remain on the bridge, to give himself a chance to escort the girl below. On second thought, however, he allowed him to depart. There must be no delay in getting canvas on the *Donegal*.

A few minutes later, as the sky flashed with lightning, he caught sight of the second officer, followed by two sailors, with Mr. Eliason fetching up in the rear, pass along the alleyway and make their way down to the fore deck. On their shoulders they were carrying the snugly rolled staysail.

Forward into the enveloping gloom three dim figures disappeared, going across the wave-swept deck, rendered all the more dangerous by the remnant of the deckload that still filled the space from rail to rail, the floating top layers surging as the steamer rolled. More of the timbers went over the side with each sea that tumbled aboard.

A frantic shout of warning, a tremendous sea that poured ten feet deep across the space where the deckload had been, then silence. Martin wanted to scream aloud at the sheer horror of it, for the men must have been caught in the middle of the open deck. Biting his lower lip until it bled, he gazed forward, striving with aching eyes to pierce the blackness that veiled a tragedy. Into the darkness he sent his voice, calling to the second officer, and hoping against hope for a reply. None came.

A few more seconds of suspense, then the first officer hastily stumbled up onto the bridge.

"They're gone, sir," he exclaimed hoarsely; "all three of them over the side. Not a chance for them, I'm afraid."

"Where's the staysail?" As he uttered this, Martin realized his apparent heartlessness, but this was no time for voicing grief. The lives of all left on board depended upon the next few minutes. A few more smashing seas like the one that had swept three men to their deaths, and—— Martin did not like to think about it. Nothing built of wood by human hands could long withstand that inhuman, terrific battering.

"The line is on it, sir. I made it fast to the clew cringle, then remained aft, paying out the line as they went for'ard, with the idea that it would be a life line should a sea come aboard. The sail went overboard with the men. I hauled in on the line, but nothing except the canvas came back. Without a doubt they were all stunned.

"Mr. Eliason,"—the words came from between clenched teeth—"I've never ordered a man to do anything that I was afraid to do myself. *I'm going for'ard and rig that sail*! I need help. Are you with me?"

"By God, sir, I'm with you! You're my idea of a *man!*"

V.

Instructions were given to the helmsman, and, after locking the girl in her stateroom, Captain Martin and Mr. Eliason started forward with the rolled-up canvas, making their way along the weather rail through the floating inferno of the fore deck. Twice, death came their way. Each time they escaped by nothing short of a miracle and finally reached the shelter of the forecastle head.

Reeving a halliard through a single block, and then slinging the block over his shoulder by a bit of line, Captain Martin ascended the weather ratlines. Alternately he was pinned against the rigging by the force of the gale, and then almost jerked from his hold when the steamer rolled abruptly and the mast swung in a wild erratic arc. The latter sensation is like having a giant invisible hand trying to snatch one away.

Around the mast, above the funneling of the stays, he made fast the block, then descended to the deck. In the meantime, the mate had reeved one end of the halliard into the head cringle of the sail and another line into the tack cringle. Allowing judicious slack to the sheet and tack and then making them fast to belaying pins, they began to heave in on the halliard. Up and up went the staysail, until the wind caught the canvas and bellied it out beyond the power of two men to raise it higher with only a single whip. Loath to make the dangerous trip aft to their quarters beneath the wheelhouse to call out the sailors, Martin again went aloft, dragging with him the light

block and gear of a watch tackle. He made it fast to the halliard high above the deck. With the aid of this purchase they hoisted the canvas. Then the watch tackle was rigged again, this time to flatten the sail. The sheet was hauled in, and the steamer began to pay off. Soon it was limping away on a course that Captain Martin fondly imagined to be due north, or, better still, north by west.

The forward deck was comparatively dry now. No seas were coming aboard, and most of the water had drained out of the scupper holes or through the large breach that the departing deckload had left in the port rail. Well satisfied with themselves at having snatched the vessel from the claws of the misguided god of storms, the two officers returned aft and climbed to the bridge. It was Captain Martin who first glanced at the compass.

His first exclamation was more emphatic than polite. "We're heading nor'east!" he yelled. "I thought that sea was kicking up rather funny. The wind has hauled around to west-sou'west. We're heading for the rocks."

Again giving instructions to the steersmen, they hurried forward to trim the sail. But their efforts were futile. The *Donegal* was now too light forward, and the sail swung the bow off before the wind. In this it was gleefully assisted by the heavy cross sea. If by dint of coaxing the steamer was brought up with the wind more than three points off her stern, she would perversely fall off again. For the first time in her history the steamer was being curbed to a certain extent by a sail, and she resented it, not being built on the lines of a windjammer.

"She sails like a cross between a hunk of cheese and a leaky mud scow!" spat Martin in disgust. "But we'll see if we can gybe and get around on the other tack."

"*What?*" exclaimed the mate.

"I said we'd *gybe!*"

"Oh!" To any one who could have seen it in the darkness the officer's face would have been a study.

The maneuver was accomplished without any difficulty. East by south, a quarter south was now the steamer's course. Mr. Eliason's suspicions turned to certainty. The strain of the night had turned Captain Martin into a lunatic. Keeping the *Donegal* on this eastward course, on the face of it, was sheer madness.

"Captain," he expostulated, "we're heading for the rocks, and will probably strike before dawn. We won't have a chance on this lee shore. The sea breaks directly against the high cliffs, and the coast hereabouts is uninhabited and without shelter. Why not rig a sea anchor and hang on until daylight? Some vessel may sight us then, and get a towline aboard."

Martin smiled for the first time that night, but there was a touch of bitterness in it.

"What good would any line do us with this sea running? Besides, if it held, there would be a salvage bill running into six figures. I'm going to save Page & Erickson that money by bringing the *Donegal* into San Francisco under her own steam. Also, I'm going to give that general manager the scare of his smug little life—if he didn't succeed in placing insurance on the vessel."

The mate gasped, and edged slightly away. Without a doubt the skipper had gone completely out of his mind.

This time Martin laughed outright at the look the light of the binnacle had revealed to him on the face of the other.

"I know what you're thinking," he said. "Well, smoke this in that fumigating instrument of yours, *I'm not!* We're going to the port of missing ships for a week or two."

"You *bet* we're going there," said the mate, with emphasis. "But not for a week or two," he added darkly. "We're going for a good long rest! My wife will cash in on my life isurance—that's the only comforting thought—and it ain't so very comforting, at that." The fact that he had no plan of his own was all that stopped rugged old Mr. Eliason from starting a life-sized mutiny then and there.

"Quit worrying," advised Martin. "We're all right—almost. I know this coast like a book; spent two years dob-hole running along here for shingles and hides and apples in a gasoline schooner. Many a time did we ride out a southerly gale by crawling into the kelp to anchor. Inshore here along the coast lies a heavy bed of kelp two miles wide. It breaks up the seas in a manner that is amazing. With a mile of it between us and the open sea we can ride easy to a single anchor. Of course, we're running a chance of striking a rock on the way in—there's a lot of them scattered around in the kelp—but there's so much seaway be-

tween them that we've got more than nine chances in ten of finding a safe anchorage. Now what do you think?"

"That I wish you'd thought of it before," returned the mate, relieved. "I've heard about the safety of a kelp anchorage, and there's nothing else to do but try it."

"This is going to be good," added Martin. "We'll be *lost* for a while. No wireless aboard to report with, and all steamers passing this point are from twelve to fifteen miles out to sea in order to pass outside the lightship. If any farmer should happen to the edge of the cliffs and sight us he'll think nothing of it, for the southern part of this county is cut off, marooned you might say, in winter. With not even wire service.

"Know-it-all Dingwell is going to eat crow. The lifeboat oars, the preservers and all the loose gear with the name *Donegal* on it will be washed on the beach *north* of Mendocino. We'll be reported as having gone down at sea.

"Only thing I'm sorry for is that old man Page will be mourning his daughter. That can't be helped, however."

"Gad, sir, you're outlinin' nothing short of a holy scandal," breathed Mr. Eliason, in admiration. "And if I know Dingwell, all the thanks you'll get for saving the vessel you can put in a 'dipsey' lead. He'll probably fire you for delaying the voyage."

The mate knew Mr. Dingwell very well, it transpired, for his prophesy eventually came true.

The chief engineer, known as "Frenchy," and remarkable for the fact that he was born of French parents in Honolulu instead of first seeing the light of day in the bagpipe country, was open-mouthed in astonishment when he came on deck.

"Smooth water!" he ejaculated. "In the open ocean, on a lee shore, a howling gale—*and smooth water!* Is this a miracle?" he inquired, devoutly crossing himself.

"No. A kelp bed," replied Martin, grinning. "By the way, did you ever hear of the *Kanapali?*"

"Sure! What engineer hasn't? The first steamer that ever managed to ship a spare propeller at sea."

"Well, you'll hear of the *Donegal* next. We'll be the second. You've got your work cut out for you, Frenchy."

"What! Not that old propeller under the fo'c's'le head? Why, one blade is missing!"

"It has three more blades than the one on the shaft now," retorted Martin. "At seven o'clock we start shifting the cargo for'ard."

Four days they worked, piling the lumber of the after deckload into sling loads and swinging it over the side on the cargo booms of the mainmast. Into the water each load was dropped, then hauled forward until raised again on the fore booms, swung inboard and stowed away in a shipshape manner. Higher and higher rose the stern, and deeper sank the bow of the steamer as the lumber was transferred. The after deck reached, the hatches were broken and the work continued on the shingles.

Slow work it was, shorthanded as they were, but on the afternoon of the fourth day the bladeless propeller hub was above the surface. Frenchy and his first assistant were lowered beneath the stern on a platform, from where, with the aid of many tools and weird exhortations, they succeeded in removing the lock nuts and knocking off the broken hub.

The following morning the spare propeller was slung outboard over the starboard quarter on a cargo boom, then hove aft on a purchase slung over the stern. Some difficulty ensued at this stage, but the difficulty was finally solved by leading another tackle under the overhang of the stern from the main port cargo boom. This enabled the engineer, after a multitude of shouted orders, which were relayed to the harrassed winch driver, to get the propeller suspended inside the rudder frame. Then came the final turning of the shaft to get the lug thereon into a corresponding position to slip into the slot in the hub. This done, the screw was slipped into place on the shaft and locked into its position.

The somber rugged cliffs reëchoed back the cheers of the crew when Frenchy announced the completion of the task. Immediately began the work of readjusting the cargo.

VI.

In the meantime a lively tilt had occurred in the office of Page & Erickson, when Elwood Page learned that Dingwell had arbitrarily ordered the *Donegal* to proceed to sea regardless of Martin's protests. In his efforts to pare expenses the general manager had decided to take a chance and not place

insurance on the steamer at the exorbitant rate demanded.

In a week came the news of the battered remnant of a lifeboat and other débris, together with much lumber from the cargo, that had been cast up on the Humboldt coast north of Cape Mendocino. The *Donegal* was officially listed as having foundered at sea. What hit Elwood Page hardest of all, however, was a wire from his sister in Eureka informing him that his daughter had taken passage on the missing vessel.

Grayer than ever, the old, frock-coated shipowner left his office on the day before New Year's. Deep lines newly engendered of suffering and anguish were showing about his fine, firm mouth and eyes.

The next morning, from force of habit, he went down to the office, arriving there late, however.

"The *Donegal* just docked at the lumber yard, sir," announced a clerk. "We've been trying to get you on the telephone ever since she was sighted. The report said she was flying a flag at half-mast."

"Heminway's lumber yard! Quick!" Page ordered his chauffeur, almost running across the sidewalk in his eagerness to climb into the machine.

Thus it happened that when Page motored to the water front, Hugo Martin, on his way to the office to report, accompanied by Miss Page, passed unseen on an inbound trolley car.

Dorothy remained in the outer office to await the return of her father, while young Captain Martin strode into the inner office for a conference with Mr. Dingwell. Martin's interview with the general manager was short and painful, beginning with Dingwell's accusing him of insolence, incompetency, insubordination, inefficiency, and disregard of orders, and intimating, that, if the truth were told, Martin was undoubtedly guilty of barratry, arson, mayhem, and a few other things.

The walls were thin. The voice of the wrathful, spluttery manager rose high. Dorothy Page heard every word he uttered. She also heard Martin tell Dingwell to go to hell and take the first turn to the left. At that she giggled.

The door opened and red-faced Captain Martin strode through it, followed by Dingwell's voice informing him in no uncertain manner that his services were dispensed with.

"Where are you going?" she inquired as he passed on his way to the street. "Please stay here and wait for dad."

"No," he replied, "I'm not going to wait. I'm going to tell the whole story to a newspaper friend of mine, and then I'm going to look for a new berth. Good-by, Miss Page."

Ten minutes later Elwood Page returned. First he gathered his daughter into his arms, then asked for Captain Martin.

"Why, dad, it's a shame!" she cried. "Mr. Dingwell discharged him, and he said he was going out to look for another job. You mustn't let him go. Daddy mine, I've certainly had some wonderful adventures. I've had nothing to eat except rice and beans and baking-powder doughnuts for five days. The cook ran out of potatoes and yeast and couldn't make bread, and his biscuits were too uneatable. I don't believe I'll ever be able to look a doughnut in the face again. And we lost three men overboard in a storm, after the steamer lost her propeller. Then Captain Martin risked his life to put up a sail, and took us right in close to the rocks to a smooth place—a kelp bed, he called it—and put another propeller on the steamer. Why, he took off his coat and worked along with the men to shift the lumber. He's a *real* man, daddy! And everybody on board has been cutting and sawing up the cargo to burn under the boilers ever since we ran out of coal three hours before we came into port. Captain Martin's a real hero, daddy; he saved all our lives."

"Yeh, and my financial life, too!" grunted the old man. "Wait here a little while, Dorothy."

"What are you going to do?"

"Dingwell's contract is up. I'm going in to fire him before I forget a lot of things I want to say."

"Fine, daddy! I'm glad! And I'm going out for a while, too. Don't expect me back until you see me."

"Where are you going?" he inquired, affectionately pinching her ear.

She blushed, but stuck to her guns. "Out to find Captain Martin," she replied.

There are other stories in this series to come. "Classic Salvage" is the next, and will be in the September 20th number.

The Last Grizzly

By Edison Marshall

Author of "The Lost Herd," Etc.

It has been the generally accepted opinion that old Slewfoot was the very last of the southern Oregon grizzlies—the last of probably the most magnificent bears that ever lived; but here is the tale of one who came after Slewfoot, named Adamzad

THE valley floor, in a certain blessed region of southern Oregon, is just as civilized a place as one could wish. There are interurban lines, and automobile highways and country homes and all such comfortable things. To the south are low foothills, and on the lower slopes men have built stock ranches and laid out orchards in even rows. The tops of these hills, however, are grown to pine. Beyond these hills are the greater mountains, slope after slope of ceaseless forest. And beyond these it is simply—Back of Beyond.

Part of that vast region, Back of Beyond, has been surveyed; and a great part of it hasn't. Just what mountains and what gorges, what shimmering lakes and roaring cascades make up the geography of the region no one exactly knows. Occasionally a prospector wanders through it, though not often; for it is only a "pocket" country. Sometimes bold hunting parties, marching in a column of files along its doubtful trails, probe its fastnesses. But, usually, a buzzard can fly all day across it and not see a single human being. Time was, when it was a wonderful game country. But because its herds of deer would go to the lower foothills in winter, where they were readily accessible to hunters, even most of the wild life is gone from the place. True, tawny mountain lions creep along the deer trails at night, and now and then the half-wild cattle are startled by the grunt and rustle of a bruin in the brush. There are grouse, of course, like great brown burs on the tree limbs, and white-tailed snowshoe rabbits with feet constructed for traversing the endless snows of winter, and various fur-bearing creatures of doubtful names, and, of course, the lean, gaunt timber wolves that howl to the moon like the lost.

It is a vast, silent, empty place—ridge on ridge and hill on hill—and when a man is lost within, he simply dies.

Years and years ago, when men that are now in early middle age were just casting their first ballot, there was a queer legend about this Beyond. Since no one really believed it, it did not particularly matter. And how it started isn't exactly known—unless it was from a story told by a sheep-herder, long-haired and ragged, who came chattering down to the lower levels one long-ago winter. But sheep-herders, men know, are always half crazy from loneliness and the nerve-racking bleat of sheep, and no one gave his story credence. He said that 'way, 'way back, where people simply did not go, in a strange region of jagged peaks and streams that disappeared, without apparent cause, into the ground, a family of grizzly bears still had their lair.

The wise ones around the town laughed heartily, and one of them bought him a drink on the strength of the story. For any fool knew that old Slewfoot was the very, very last of the southern Oregon grizzlies, and he was killed late in the last century. The Oregon grizzlies were a magnificent race of bears, probably the biggest bears that lived upon the face of the earth, but the line was extinct long and long ago. They were savage cattle-killers, too, and they had been hunted down and slain like so many criminals. Now and then some particularly valiant hunter, with a particularly ineffective gun, would have his head crushed like an eggshell at a single tap from a wounded animal; but the race had been wiped out, men, women, and children. And the idea that a couple of them were left, even in the wild and remote Beyond, was a story worth slapping one another on the back about.

"But I seen 'em," the sheep-herder swore. "I wasn't drunk, and don't I know a grizzly when I see him? He was as big as two big steers put together——"

"You take the watch!" the boys about the bar laughed at him.

Now all this was twenty years ago. And the strangest thing of all about this sheep-herder's story was—that it was absolutely true.

Back of Beyond, where white men did not go, a few bears, who had been cubs with Slewfoot, had gone for safety in the long past. They had bred, and some of them had died from varied causes. But the truth remained that, when the sheep-herder came down with his story, in 1899, there were two half-grown grizzlies, making tracks the size of a small flour sack in the sand of the creek banks, ranging the wildest fastnesses of Beyond.

How they grew up, how they got their living and came to their strength and mated and bred and died, no man knows. The shadows of the hills closed upon them, after the sheep-herder had come to live in more sociable regions; and people forgot the possibility of their existence. But they did all these things—fed, mated, bred, and died. And a matter of ten years later, there were still two half-grown grizzlies, ranging the same thickets. All their brothers and sisters and cousins, if they had any, had died; and there were no inscriptions to designate the place of their remains and the manner of their death.

There were never two more perfect specimens of grizzlies than these two. Their race was almost extinct, it was true; but they were splendid examples of the recurrence of type. They lived their lives much as bears are ordained to do, hunted and fed and played and dozed in winter and mated and bred. And in a rocky cavern at the foot of a rocky cañon, far in the most remote part of Beyond, Adamzad was born.

Of course, he had no name until men named him; unless his mother had some designation for him in bear talk, and that we have no means of knowing. He was a rather ordinary-looking grizzly cub at first; and he differed from the many grizzly cubs who had been born before him only in the fact that he was about one size too large. He was solid and roly-poly and fuzzy and blind—stone blind.

All bears are born blind, so this did not particularly worry his mother. He fed in the natural way, and his grip had more vigor and strength than is quite natural in cubs. As a rule, mother bears have very little interest in their offspring for the first few weeks; but whether because of her anguish at his birth, or of the hearty grip of his lips upon her breast, or, perhaps, only because she walked the vast range alone except for her growling, scowling pig of a husband, it was true that she was tremendously gratified and pleased with him from the first. There were no other mother bears in the region to whom she could tell of him, or show him off, so his shaggy old father had to listen and look all the time. They were lonely for their kind; so even the savage "old man" of the family found himself devoting more time to his wife and offspring than is the custom among the grizzlies.

But Adam—which is short for Adamzad—was just entering the weaning process, when the first important event of his life took place. A man who made an illegal living from selling deer hides had climbed up into the outer limits of Beyond the previous day, in search of new hunting grounds; and in a space between some distant trees, he had seen what seemed to be an enormous bear. Yet it was too big for a bear—or else the distance was deceiving. He looked as big as a young elephant. The man had shot, just once.

And this first, strange event in Adam's life occurred when his vast father came dragging to the den in the gray of morning. The cub, watching out the entrance of the cavern, saw that he walked with a singular falter. He saw his mother trot to meet him, and lap for an instant at a red and ugly place on her mate's shoulder, then fall to whining softly. And as he looked, the great bear rolled over on his side. He had a great deal of dignity, after the manner of the larger forest creatures, so he did not permit himself to howl. His mate whined above him, however, and his cub barked questions from the cave. And before the noon sun shone upon them, he was dead.

Far away, at this same hour, Hawkins was telling his pardner about it. "I'm tellin' you," he said, "that the big thing I shot at was a bear. It wasn't a black bear—it could've et six black bears for breakfast. It wasn't the right color for a brown bear, and, besides, the biggest brown bear what

is would have looked like its cub. It was a bigger bear yet."

"What you tryin' to do? Tell me there's a den of grizzlies up there on the divide?"

"I'm not tellin' you nothin'. But you remember—there was a story, once, that was told around through the valley about how some grizzlies still hung out up there. Anyway, I drew blood on the old devil and tomorrow I'm goin' to track him down and find him."

Hawkins, a vicious, dark, and ugly figure in the fresh green of the mountains, followed down the trail the next day. It took him far from his old haunts. It led him up steep mountains, and down still, fragrant valleys, and over rocky ledges, and along creek banks. It was a long trail, and only the thought of a matchless bear hide, worth an even five hundred of any man's money, and not to mention sundry fees as a guide for hunting parties when he carried his story down into the valley, kept him at it at all. On and on, and finally he began himself to be a little afraid. He had not known that the region was so mysterious and vast. It seemed to have no sounds at all. It was so still that it hurt the eardrums.

He skirted the edge of a limpid lake, in whose clear waters a white man's fish line had never fallen since the beginning of the world, and where great lake trout leaped in crescents of silver, and surmounted one more hill. Then all at once he came upon the grizzly's body, still and cold in the twilight.

He was not particularly eager to go close to it at first. He had heard of bears, believed dead, that—but yet, it was too big a prize to miss. And it seemed more huge than ever. It was a grizzly, after all—a grizzly of the grizzlies.

He came up close, warily; but the fierce, brown eyes were glazed with death. There was nothing to be feared here. And all at once he laughed in triumph and kicked the great, still form with the toe of his ugly shoe.

Then he whirled, for something that made the noise of an avalanche was bursting through the thickets upon him. He screamed in terror. The brush parted before his starting eyes, and a great, grizzled avenger lunged through in the glory of the charge. No bear could be so huge, so magnificent in wrath! And it was not forty yards distant.

It bore down upon him like an express train, a thing so huge, so monstrous that Hawkins' wicked heart turned to ice, and seemed to crack open with horror. But he was a tried hunter. He lifted his rifle; and he could not miss the towering form. He shot, five times. His rifle was a heavy, accurate weapon for big game, of about forty caliber, yet the bullets seemed to have no more effect than would the onslaught of so many bees. It bore down and down; and Hawkins flung away his empty gun and fled, screaming to the silent wilds for help.

But no tree stood near enough. A great paw, such as would smash the skull of an ox like so much glass, lifted and struck down. All at once the wilderness was still again.

And thus it came that Hawkins did not return in the twilight, as he had promised. His partner built the fire high to guide his way, but slept all night alone. He made his lonely coffee the next morning, and all the next day waited for his returning footfall on the trail. It did not come at all.

The next day he made a half-hearted search for Hawkins. Of course, he could not find the blood trail, and the report of his gun was answered only by its echo. He climbed a few ridges, and followed a creek a distance, and even went to the edge of Beyond. But he turned back, tired, at night.

Again he built the fires high, and at midnight he signaled with his gun. But in the morning, it seemed that he was already accustomed to loneliness. The skins that were curing in their little cabin would not have to be divided between two of them now. Of course, Hawkins had been a good partner, but it did not really matter.

So the next night the fire went out at midnight the same as always.

Far in the unknown, three bodies lay quite close together. Two of them were those of huge bears; the third, ugly and dark in the fallen leaves, resembled in some slight degree that of a man. And in a cavern the very last of a noble line, a bear cub not yet entirely weaned, whimpered with loneliness and hunger.

But the one man who suspected his existence, who might have hunted him or whose half-believed stories might have prompted others to hunt him, was dead. Thus it was that he had a fair chance of growing to maturity, in the silence and fastness of Beyond.

II.

Even so small a bear cub as little Adam has some dim sort of mental processes; and, sitting on the floor of his cavern, he tried to puzzle out why his mother did not come to him. Some voice told him it was time and yet she lay still out among the dead oak leaves. He whimpered to her, and even attempted a small bark. But she did not even turn her head.

Instinct prompted all kinds of hungry and wistful noises, and all through the long twilight he waited for her to come. Then the darkness dropped down, as always in the mountains, like a curtain falling from the great peak looming over him, and with it came the cold. He looked in vain out into the shadows; but he could not even see her now.

All that night he waited in the cavern. He was just a baby, in spite of the fact that if nature spared him he would some time weigh a ton, and he was not greatly different from less hairy babies, hungry in their cribs in the habitations far below. He made baby sounds, whimperings and yelps that were almost human. He missed the sustaining bear milk in his stomach, and more than that, he missed the old she bear's companionship and warmth. He hadn't known what fear meant, before. But he learned that night. He heard it in the soft rustle of the tree limbs over his head, and the rattle of a bowlder on the slope; and it lay, particularly terrible, in the long periods of stillness that ensued between. He was a miserable, weak, and despairing little bear when the morning broke.

It broke just as the night fell, all at once. It cheered him mightily. Perhaps the fierce struggle for existence that his parents had waged, fugitives as they were in the remote and barren wastes of Beyond, had bred in him determination and courage not usually the property of bears. He whimpered again to his mother, but she was obdurate as ever. Then, without hesitation or faltering, the little orphan decided to paddle out and investigate.

He came tumbling through the dry leaves, a pathetically eager little creature. But his mother did not look up. He sprang up upon her, and thrust his black nose against her breast. Then he sprang back, frightened. The breast had no more warmth than the walls of his cavern.

Very slowly and thoughtfully he crept around the great figure; and all at once a strange, wild smell came to his nostrils. He followed the source of it, and found it in a curious black stain on the dead leaves about the vast head. It was an odd, pungent, exciting smell, and the hair rose and stood straight on his neck. Then he tumbled away in sudden terror.

He paused, fifty feet distant, and gave himself up to inconsolable grief. He whimpered and howled, and made strange, unknown grief noises in his throat. But he did not return to the prone figures. After his grief was done, he ambled away quite cheerily in obedience to a call within himself.

At the threshold of weaning, Adam's digestive apparatus was quite capable of handling more substantial things than milk. But hungry as he was, he did not know which way to turn in search of food.

He had not gone far before he found it necessary to crawl over the almost disintegrated remains of a small log. And as his feet scrambled at the bark, a fat beetle put in an appearance. The moving spot caught the cub's eye, and he slapped at it with his paw. The next instant it was in his mouth, and down his throat.

The taste quite surprised him. It was better than milk. He sat down an instant to allow his reflexes to tell him what to do; then began to look around for more beetles. Fortunately, the rotting trunk seemed almost alive with them.

He found them under the bark, and in cunning nests in the rotted fiber, and on the ground beneath. There were some juicy grubs here, too, but at first he paid no attention to them. Moving so slowly, they did not catch his eye. But he tried one for a sample when the beetles gave out.

They were better than the beetles. He licked up a good score of them in the next three minutes.

Ants had made a hill near the end of the stump; and though smaller game, they had a tart, acid taste that suited him just right. No man can tell how many ants he ate. His warm, smooth tongue reached here and there, and the ants vanished by the army. Then, with several ounces of the most nutritious food in his tiny stomach, he lay down in the sun and slept.

When he awoke it was almost time for the darkness to come down. But he read

nothing in the silence and the long shadows. He examined his log again, then roamed into a thicket. It was here that he made the acquaintance of something even better than beetles. He was first aware of a dainty smell that reminded him of his hunger with particular vigor. In just an instant, in a way known only to bears, he found the source. It exuded from clusters of round, ripe berries, growing on a bush.

It was then that little Adam really feasted. His tongue reached here and there, and he gathered a stomachful of berries with remarkable dispatch. They were so good that he quite forgot the promise of falling night in the gray skies and the long, strange shadows. All at once darkness was upon him.

He ran as quick as his short legs could carry him, straight to his cavern. He made a grotesque figure in the darkness; and he disturbed a flock of grouse roosting in a thicket. Frightened, they darted away, but their fear was nothing compared to his. But at the same time he had a thought, in the remote places of his mind, whether or not these great, overgrown beetles would be good to eat!

He was cold again, and lonely and frightened; yet the night did not seem nearly so long. He started up with a miniature "woof!" when the first ray of light probed into his cavern; and at once resumed his explorations. He discovered that roots were good to eat that day; and some that he devoured gave him a terrible attack of colic the next night. And he had quite a game with a tree toad that hopped from under a rotted stump. The game ended quite delightfully—with the toad in his own stomach.

This was by far the biggest single meat portion he had ever had in his brief life, and at first he was quite alarmed with the sensations it gave him. But he did just exactly as nature expected him to do. He lay down and slept it off. When he awoke, he felt like two bears.

It grew spring in Beyond. Every day the sun stayed up longer, and the wind at night was not so cold. The great snow patches that lay on the northern side of the slopes, grew smaller every day. He was a lonely little bear at night, but a well-fed, happy, romping little bear in daytime. The greater his wanderings, the more that he found that was good to eat. And one marvelous night he got so tired on the hillsides that he went to sleep on a little scratched-up bed of leaves, without returning to his cave. Thereafter, whether he slept there or on the rocky crags or in the brush, did not matter in the least.

But he could not get away from fear. One day a thunderstorm came like a scourge to his valley, and bellowed like a thousand mighty bears in the sky, and lightning cracked open some of the trees, and the rain blinded his eyes. He rushed, whimpering and howling, to his almost-deserted cavern. Once a long, tawny creature crept along a tree limb over his head, and he lay utterly motionless, yet with palpitating heart, in the leaves until it had gone away. And one night he heard the gaunt wolves singing together on the hilltops, and it froze the little heart within him.

He had made a few friends now. A yearling black bear, who already fancied himself quite a grown-up, met him quite often in the valley, and they had some strange, exciting games. They were nearly the same size already. And if anything, Adam was the more active, more sure of eye and stroke. The game usually ended with the yearling scampering away through the thicket, and the little grizzly yelping and snapping at his legs behind.

But the black bear was a valued acquaintance. It taught him how to climb—an art that he later lost—and showed him the best way to crack the shell of an acorn in his teeth. And one wonderful day, when they played along the margin of the little lake in the center of the valley, the black bear pushed him in.

As naturally as if born of an aquatic race, he struck out at once with his furry paws and swam back into the bank. He was somewhat startled by the experience, but immeasurably delighted. They took turns at pushing each other in most of the rest of the afternoon, and as a result went without their supper. The experience was worth a meal, however.

When the long, hot August days came to the valley, he was quite a formidable-looking bear. He had grown claws of which he was immeasurably proud; and he had learned a thousand secrets, such as you and I will never in this world know, from hill and valley and stream. He never went hungry now. He could eat grass, if he had to, and his friend, the black bear, showed him how

to fish. They would crawl out on a fallen log over the mountain stream, and would stand as still as forms in iron. Then, when a trout gleamed beneath them, they would strike down. The game was to knock the fish all the way to the bank beyond. There was no better sport in all the mountains.

His first experience with a bee tree was more painful than pleasant. The little barbed warriers stormed out at him; and at first he was too amazed at the sudden attack to do anything but sit down and howl. They stung him on his nose, and between his claws, and on his pointed ears. Howling dismally, he smote at them with his paws, and when he opened his mouth, they stung him on his tongue. This was too much, and, still moaning like a baby, he fled into the thicket. And on this occasion Adam got his name.

So engrossed had he been with the bees that he did not see the strangest animal of all who watched him from a hillside. This creature stood on two legs, instead of four, and only his face was naked. If he had seen him the cub might have been even more frightened than of the bees—because here was the archenemy of his people, man.

It was true. Yet, on closer inspection, the man on the hillside seemed furthest in the world from an enemy. At present, his head bent back with laughter, he did not look dangerous at all.

"Go it! Go it, you little devil," he cheered the bear. The cub stood erect, pawing at his eyes. "Go it, little Adamzad, what walks like a man."

He had kind eyes, now lighted with fun, and he seemed as lithe and graceful as the forest creatures themselves. He carried no weapon but a miner's pick. Although his hair was shot with gray, he seemed singularly young and active. Better still, he had the gentle face of one who had learned what is true in life from the wilds, who knows the woods and loves them.

It was Nathan Funk—whose name, in the valley, had almost been forgotten. Such long years had he been lost to the affairs of men.

All at once he grew sober. "Jumpin' mackerel!" he exclaimed. "What kind of a cub is that?"

For the first time he noticed that the whimpering beast had not the color of a brown bear, nor yet a black. "It's not any kind of a bear I've seen up here before," he told himself. "I wonder if it can be, but, of course, it can't——" He followed the fleeing cub with his eyes. "But it is!" And the eyes filled with wonder and delight. "It is, as I'm standin' here, a grizzly!"

As for little Adam—the time came when he could scoop the golden heart out of a bee tree as ably as his friend, the black. Thereafter his eyes brightened at just the sight of a wild bee working in the flowers.

By this, the big brown bears that wandered, now and then, through his valley gave him more attention than is usually bestowed upon the cubs. In the first place, he was gaining girth and weight every day. In the second, he had speed and agility and strength quite beyond the usual limits of a cub. He inherited part of it from his parents, and part had been the result of the grim battle he had made for life ever since his shaggy mother had died outside her cavern.

He was a cub until October; and then an incident occurred that at once made of him a grizzly in fact and name. The leaves were seared and withering then, and winter, a dread menace, foretold its approach in the thin crust of ice on the lake in the early morning. He had learned by now to move with singular silence through the thickets, and even the dry leaves and twigs beneath his feet would not betray his approach.

In a thicket on a hillside a fawn leaped from his path. It was a long-legged, awkward creature, perhaps six months old, and at an inner prompting, Adam bounded after it. It seemed to him that almost in an instant he was beside it, and he smote it with his paw. Then he was surprised to see it lying so still.

His claws had torn the soft skin from the neck and a strange, wild smell that he remembered long ago came to his nostrils. It made his blood leap, and he reached out a savage head and tore at the flesh with his teeth. Then he turned, to meet an attack from the rear.

A full-grown buck, with lowered horns, came charging down the hillside toward him. He did not flee as usual at the sight of the horned bucks. The taste and smell of blood had maddened him, filled him with strange desires and sudden, fierce courage. The eyes of the deer were green flame, and it had come to avenge the piteous bleat of the fawn. The bear waited the attack, every muscle rigid.

He leaped aside as the buck was upon

him, and, whirling, struck with all his strength. A savage growl such as had never found voice in his throat before started the crows in the young firs. And what was this strange thing? For the great deer went to his knees, its skull smashed as if by a rifle bullet!

In an instant the savage thing that had been the grizzly cub was upon him, tearing at the throat with his teeth. And he knew, as surely as if a voice had told him, that he had come into his own at last. No longer was he a wild pig of the mountains, grub-digger and berry-eater. He was an eater of meat, the fierce hunter and killer that his race had been before him.

And the yearling black, who had been tagging at his heels, came up just in time to see the wild flame grow in his playmate's eyes, and hear the roar that he uttered for all the forest people to hear and heed. And he turned, terror-stricken, and fled into the thicket.

III.

The people in the valley below had completely lost trace of Nathan Funk. And so apart was he from the affairs of men that he knew the names and habitations of but two of his acquaintances in the days when he himself was a miner in the valley. One of these two loved him; but because he was a broken, chattering travesty of a man, living ever in the twilight of drugs, he did not really matter. The other of the two hated him; and since he was now a cattleman, living on the slopes of his own mountains, he did matter—a great deal.

One night in the long ago, about four years after the sheep-herder came into town with his story of the grizzlies, a prisoner had escaped from the county jail. Some one had passed him a strong file, and he had cut away his bars. But unlike most Western communities, the people did not make posses and ride in pursuit. Instead, they stood in little groups and expressed unholy delight that he was gone.

"Your sentence," the judge had told this man, "will be three months in jail, *and* three hundred dollars fine." He gave him both because he was afraid that the townspeople would make a purse and pay his fine; and the judge had promised Wells, the game warden, that Nat Funk would suffer for his offense. It had been—to kill an elk after sundown. It had only been a few minutes after, and Nathan, the best sportsman in the world, had not been watching the sun at all; but technically he had committed a crime. Wells, who hated him, had tracked him over valley and hill for days, just to catch him at illegal hunting. Three hundred dollars, and three months in jail! And the people were glad that he escaped.

In the long years since, Nathan Funk had made his home in one of the valleys of Beyond. After all, he had not suffered from Wells' persecution. He had been obliged to flee and hide, but the result had been more happy days, more sweet and joyous content than he had ever known before. He was a renegade, truly; but to the deer herds that stole down the narrow trails in the gray dawns, to the grouse that nested in the shrubbery, to the lean wolf and the stealthy cougar, he was companion and blood brother. He had learned their ways. He knew their winter quarters. He read the secrets of their strange, wild lives. From a sportsman, who only knows the thrill and intoxication of the chase of the wild creatures of the earth, he had become a naturalist, to find a deeper, more lasting joy in the serene study of their secret ways.

Still he hunted, but only for meat. He caught his trout in the streams and lakes. He had found in his wanderings in the more remote parts of Beyond a "pocket" of gold, marvelously rich, and he worked an hour or two in alternate months for enough of the yellow stuff to supply his simple wants at the mountain store in the hills. He had his cabin near the mine, and the wild things browsed about it without fear.

He had no wish to return to his native valley. Besides, although he could pay his fine, the three months' sentence still hung over him; and Wells, the ex-warden who was now an influential cattleman living on the slopes, was still ready to prosecute him the moment his presence was known.

Student of nature that he was, he soon became aware that a new king was gathering power in his valley. It was a young grizzly, who had wandered in from the farther mountains. "But he's one I'm never goin' to tame," Nathan remarked to his kettle of mulligan. "And if I can jest keep them houn's from the valley from comin' up and shootin' him before he gets his growth, he's goin' to start a revolution in this valley that will make Russia look like a piker!"

For already, in his second year, Adamzad

was a killer, an eater of meat. Already the big brown, who weighed nearly six hundred pounds, and who ruled the little valley with a furry paw, watched his exploits with some apprehension. It used to be the sport of the great, gray wolves to leap at him from the thickets and laugh, in their wolfish way, as he tumbled over himself in flight. But this game was not as popular as once it had been. Adam had a way of running the opposite direction from what they expected —and once, the idle pack found one of their number very still and rigid in the pine needles, with its skull curiously cracked and broken. The mountain lion, lying in wait for deer, grew to remain very motionless and silent when he passed beneath.

Every month he was a better hunter. He knew how to wait on the deer trails so that the pungent smell of his furry hide would be blown up the valley; and one slap of his great paw was all that was ever needed. He learned to leap suddenly into a flock of grouse, strike to the right and left with wonderfully accuracy and speed, and savage power; and then feast at his leisure. And often, in the twilight, he would stand on the rocky ledges and bellow defiance to the whole wilderness world.

He was still an able fisher. He would wait on the fallen logs over the river, and he knew just the lightning side stroke that would knock a thirty-pound salmon far out of the water. And once, as he waited on a deer trail, a great, long-horned steer came instead.

The thing weighed a thousand pounds, and the bear, at the close of his second year, but six hundred; but it was an uneven fight at that. It was one of the half-wild cattle such as Wells, on the slopes below, had hoped to brand and claim for his own; but the raking swipe of Adam's claws was the only brand this steer was ever to know. That night the grizzly feasted till he could eat no more; and for three days more as well. Thereafter the wolves that before had been his masters fed on the hide and head.

"And to think he's the last of his line," Nathan Funk regretted, as he watched him from his cabin door one night. "Lord, but I wish you could find a mate; but there ain't no such animal up here. Ain't it a shame! Ain't it just a shame!"

Then he turned to cook his supper. "I suppose it don't much matter after all. Them hunters from the valley are climbin' further every year, and if they was a dozen grizzlies, they'd kill 'em all. It's just a lost race."

Adam was not worrying about these things, however. He was more concerned with satisfying his voracious appetite. He never recovered from his love of honey. Hunting bee trees was hardly exciting enough sport for him, as a rule; but more than once he had appropriated the finds of other bears. And a day came when the matter of a bee tree led to a battle for the final mastery of the valley.

It happened not a quarter of a mile from Nathan's cabin, and he was a cheering spectator through it all. It was a windy, rainy day; and Adam's temper was already low as it could safely go without trouble and disaster to the entire valley. He went scowling and growling through the underbrush. And when he came out upon the hillside he saw that one of the brown bears had found a bee tree; and was this moment clawing into it and scooping out its richness.

Adam approached in his clumsy gallop—a gait that would overtake the fastest steer in the hills—and he was almost upon the brown before he recognized him as the great monarch of the valley, the old patriarch that Nathan affectionately called "Old Eli."

"There's either goin' to be a dead grizzly," Nathan exclaimed, "or a new king-pin!"

For Adam did not check his pace. He was cross, and hungry for honey; and, besides, he weighed even more than this haughty brown. True, he was not nearly so old, or so scarred in battle. The brown bear reared up, growling. And in an instant they were at grips.

"Go it, Adam! Go it, Eli!" the naturalist called, slapping his thighs. And as he cheered, the word passed through the forest, in the secret ways of beasts, that a great battle was being waged for the mastery of the valley, and all the black bears and the lesser browns came wandering out of the thickets to watch.

They fought in the way of bears, lunging and biting, and striking with their paws, and now and then attempting that terrible bear hug that means death. They shuffled about in the forest leaves, head to head. The old brown was wise and crafty. He knew that he must win by skill. The young grizzly, only half grown now, was active and huge

and marvelously strong. He depended on his strength alone.

It was such a fight as is never seen in Oregon woods in these latter days. The last of a noble line, half grown, and the great and tried leader of a lesser but powerful breed. They growled till the hills echoed; and the watching bears, lurking here and there in the thickets, growled too. The hair stood stiff on their necks.

More than once, by tricks and wiles learned in the combats of a dozen years, the brown inflicted vicious, painful bites in the grizzly's head and shoulders, and more than once he landed the terrific, whirling side stroke with his paws. But all they seemed to do was infuriate the animal. They all seemed ineffective.

By now the grizzly was bloodstained and terrible to see; but his little eyes were burning with wicked, green flame. And his strength seemed greater every moment as the other weakened. He stood his punishment, waiting for his chance.

"He's like the allied armies!" the old naturalist exclaimed. "He's losin' all the battles—but I believe he's goin' to win the war!"

The brown fought desperately; for in such a fight as this to lose meant death. Besides, he had been the honored king of all the forest, and his pride would never permit him to be a subject to a bear of another breed. All at once he lunged too far, in a wild attempt to land a telling blow.

The great forepaws of the grizzly went round him. Like inexorable bands of iron they closed down, tighter and tighter, and he struggled and growled in vain. They both stood erect, as in some barbaric jungle dance. And all at once the brown, ragged thing that had been a bear grew limp in his arms, and the grizzly let it fall.

Just for an instant the grizzly stood straight on the hillside, and a growl went out that reverberated through all the thickets, and echoed back from the mountains. The deer heard it, and were afraid. The wild steers heard it, and crashed through the brush in terror. The mountain hogs, once tame, but savage now as wild boars, fled grunting up the hillsides. The mountain lions lay closer to their tree limbs, and the wolves stole back to their caverns. And the brown and black bears, who had watched the battle, all slunk away.

Then the grizzly went down on his four feet, and solemnly waddled over to the bee tree.

IV.

As Nathan Funk cooked his lonely supper he had but one comment for the battle. "It ain't every man who has a king hang around his kitchen door and eat honey," said he. "As I remember it, it was the queen what was in the kitchen eatin' honey!" He laughed joyfully. "So I guess I'll just have to fix it so he'll come back every day."

He knew, after the manner of bears, that the grizzly would return the next day and put a wistful tongue into the bee tree. As long as honey was to be found there, he would continue to return. So after dark, when the silence of the forest night hung over the hills, he scooped out a pint of the yellow stuff from his own store, and carried it out and put it in the hollow tree.

As he had known, the grizzly revisited the tree next day. If he had any mental processes in regard to the subject, he must have thought that they were particularly energetic bees, to have so replenished themselves in one night. When the darkness came again, Funk left him another pint.

Thus began a custom that lasted clear until the grizzly had reached maturity. Incidentally, it involved on Nathan's part, extensive searches for bee trees to keep his ungainly pet supplied. There was no more able beeman in the whole range than Nathan, and he knew just how, with his little box or trap, to track the bees to their stores. Every day he carried a pint of wild honey to the tree, and almost every day the great bear paused in his hunting to get it out.

The bees had forsaken the tree long since, but the bear came just the same. It was a joy to Nathan to see the huge, gray form break the thickets and climb the slope; then poke his tremendous head into the hollow of the tree. The great arm would reach in, seize the comb in his claws, and solemnly thrust it into his mouth. The man delighted in the bear's daily growth, the constant addition to his girth and length and weight. He was the unchallenged king of all his forests. After his winter doze in his rocky cavern, the first place he went was to the bee tree. And a honeycomb was waiting him, just the same.

By now the tale that a great grizzly had his wild home in Beyond was revived in the

valley. Too many cattle had disappeared, for one thing—and brown bears do not kill cattle. Even a mountain lion can not, as a rule, pull down a grown steer. A prospector had found a track, once, almost as long as a man's arm, and once a surveyor had caught a glimpse of something gray and vast between the trees. Once, in his cups, the partner of the lamented Hawkins had repeated the story his fellow poacher told before he disappeared. So when spring came men toiled over the weary trails of Beyond to hunt.

But they came back empty handed. In the first place, the woods were endless; and even such an enormous bear as old Adam was a needle in a haystack in its spaces of forest and hill. In the second, he was wary, and shy of suspicious sights and sounds. And better yet, Nathan had made a pact in his defense with the one man in the hills he called a friend—a half-mad creature who lived on the lower slopes, and who found his joy in life in his hypodermic needle and his drugs.

Hunters that came up the Beyond needs must pass the cabin of this chattering fool; and he was always ready to meet them with the same lie. The great bear, he said, had wandered down, past his cabin, and on to the other side of the divide. Many and many a valiant hunter was turned aside in this way.

As the spring grew to summer, and summer to fall, Adam came to the zenith of his strength. Perhaps he would weigh more, in old age; but his vast frame was fully developed. Not a wild creature in the entire United States equaled him for strength. He was born of the greatest race of bears that ever trod the face of the earth in the memory of man; and the hard fight he had waged for life in his younger days had made of him the greatest of his race. His vast claws were each as large as the horn of a Jersey heifer, his head alone weighed hundreds of pounds, and there was nothing in the forest on which to try his strength. The steers that he killed were just playthings. The brown bears were like cubs, to snort at in disdain. In fact, old Nathan, who had the bear's good at heart, found himself wishing that there could be another of his breed to play with, and to perpetuate his kind.

"The poor old devil," Nathan would say. "Don't know his strength—for there ain't no one to try it on. What's the use of bein' so mighty in such a small pond as this! He ain't gettin' a fair show, he ain't. Them claws were made for fightin', and that big body was made to make other big bodies stand aroun'. There ain't no joy in life for him here. His birthright is a life of fightin' and adventure and knockin' over moose, and battlin' with the other he bears, and he ain't gettin' none of it."

In the fall, there came a real trial of the great bear's strength. He weighed nearly a ton by now. Still he had come for his honey, and, as a whole, he had been unmolested by men. Sometimes he saw old Nathan, working at his mine, but he had become used to the brown figure. Once he had beheld a strange, pale creature, wandering on the hillside; but he had known that this chattering human being was neither a thing to chase or run from. Some sense of sportsmanship and fairness, from which the larger forest things never can quite escape, kept him from the first; and his native intelligence from the second. For it was just old Dick, the dope fiend who had his cabin on the slopes.

On a long, still October day, when the clouds hung heavy in the sky, Nathan Funk made one of his excursions to the upper hills to study the gray squirrels. Late in the afternoon he started back, down the barren slopes. And halfway down he passed a little group of cattle, browsing on the dead grass.

He gave them no thought at first. The leader of the herd was a huge bull, long-horned and red-eyed, as powerful as a bison. The beast was in savage temper. And wholly without warning, the animal blared in rage and charged him.

He was scarcely forty yards distant; and the slope was perfectly bare of trees. Nathan was a naturalist, not a hunter, and he was unarmed. For the fraction of an instant he stood still, in stark terror. Then he bounded down the slope.

With lowered head, with eyes like rubies, the great creature thundered in pursuit. Huge as he was, he gained upon the fleeing figure at every leap. The man flung off his hat, hoping to divert the bull until he could reach a tree; but the beast did not give it a glance. Nathan knew what mercy he could expect from the sharp horns if the thing overtook him. He knew he was running for his life.

He looked back once, and screamed out in his terror. It was scarcely ten yards behind him now. The nearest tree was still thirty yards away. But on the side of the hill, the hazel and buck brush had made a heavy thicket, and, hoping for an instant's salvation, he crushed into it. The thundering feet of the bull were just behind.

But the brush would never have stopped the savage attack, if it had not been for a strange interlude. For in diving into the shrubbery, the man collided with a great, grizzled form that had suddenly reared up like a titan from its bed of leaves. In his wild flight, he had ran smack into the great king of the forest, Adam the great, himself.

The bear uttered a startled "Woof!" then shook the hillside with his growl. A bear is always particularly jealous of his rest; and Adam was furiously angry. He looked about for the thing that had struck him. And all he saw was a great, savage bull crashing through the thickets beside him.

The great body stretched up, then leaped. A cat could not have moved more quickly. But the distance was too far. His great paw only grazed the creature's shoulder. Bellowing, it turned to fight.

This was no ordinary bovine, such as the grizzly had been wont to kill for his dinner. The others had always fled, in terror; and Adam had nothing to do but chase them and strike them down. The bull, however, magnificent in his wrath, turned with lowered head and charged.

The interlude gave Nathan time to reach his tree, and in a moment he was safe in its branches. Then he turned to watch the desperate battle on the hillside. The bull was bellowing his wrath, and the bear's savage growls started the deer from their coverts far below.

"Kill 'im, Adam!" he cheered. "I'm for you! Kill the devil!"

Neither of the great beasts as much as glanced at him. They were battling furiously, paw and tooth and shoulder and horn.

But it was not a long fight, savage though it was. For at last the bull lunged an inch too far; and the grizzly saw his chance. He whirled, putting all his strength in his famous side stroke. No creature of flesh and blood could stand against such a blow. It caught his great adversary on the shoulder, cracking it like a thing of pine and driving him to his knees. In an instant the bear was above him, striking to the right and left. The great fangs lowered at the throat. And the battle ended, quickly as it had begun.

Again the bear rose on his hindfeet, and his vast chest heaved as he blared his triumph. But he did not stop to eat of the warm flesh. Evidently he had but recently fed, for he sniffed once at the torn throat, glanced once in disdain at the stampeding cattle, and turned with ponderous dignity down the hillside. Nathan watched him quite out of sight.

Then he climbed down. On the great torn shoulder of the bull the naturalist could make out a brand—a huge "W" burned on the hide with a branding iron.

"Lordy!" the man exclaimed. "So it's one of my old friend Wells' cattle—his prize bull without a doubt. If it had to be some one's, I'm glad it was his. And won't he swear—Lordy, won't he swear!"

Then the naturalist grew serious. For he realized at once that the ex-game warden would swear vengeance, among other things, and soon there would be hunting party on the hills.

"Old man," he said, looking toward the shadowed thickets into which the grizzly had disappeared. "Old Adam—you saved my life, and like as not I'll have a chance to pay the debt!"

V.

Soon after dark the remaining members of Wells' herd came stampeding to his pasture, their eyes vivid with terror. Wells heard them blaring at his gate, and, after a vain attempt to kick his son to wakefulness, he went out himself to investigate. The mark of the fear was still in their eyes and panting sides.

"But where's my bull!" he exclaimed. "Son! Wife!" he bellowed. "Somethin's happened to my bull. The cattle came in all of 'em stampeded, and my prize bull's gone!"

His lean wife rose from her bed and came out to share his wrath; and his sleepy son followed. But Wells had guessed the truth before they came.

"It's the same beast what's been gettin' so many of my cattle. Maybe it's a bear and maybe a cougar; but I'm goin' up and get his scalp!" And chattering with rage, he stood shaking his fist toward the darkness of Beyond.

True to his word, he followed the long cattle trail the next day, far into the remote,

wild heart of Beyond. He passed the lake and surmounted the hill where Adam was born. He crossed the brush-filled valley, and mounted the long, bare ridge. And on this ridge he found his bull, and it would take no more prizes at the country fairs. The grizzly had dined upon it that same morning.

Cursing the whole world of forest creatures, Wells looked about for the tracks. He found them easily. And his hard eyes grew wide with wonder.

Nothing but a grizzly, such a grizzly as had never dwelt in Beyond before, had made those tracks. The legends had been true, after all. He tried to follow the tracks, secure in the heavy rifle he carried in the hollow of his arm, but he lost them in a moment.

But how could he hope to run the bear to earth in these vast wilds? Then he chuckled with savage delight.

For even as he spoke the gray clouds seemed to lower above him, and the first flakes of a snowstorm sifted down. It was the first snowfall of the year; but Wells had lived long enough in the mountains to know that it would not cease once it began. To-morrow there would be a tracking snow over all mountains. Better yet, the bear would be certain to return that night for a second meal, and his tracks would be fresh in the morning. All he would have to do was collect a little group of his neighbors and chase the creature to his lair.

Nathan saw him on his way home, and he read the determination and hatred in his face. But he did not show himself. This was the man who had arrested him years before, who would yet like nothing better than to send the police about his ears and hold him for his unexpired sentence. Nathan knew, as surely as he knew the way of beast and bird that shared the valley with him, that the next day a hunting party would avenge the bull. Besides—the hide alone was worth nearly a thousand, and might win the hunters a questionable sort of fame in every corner of the State.

The snow was falling softly, steadily, and already the fall leaves were heavy with it, and the distant hills were hidden. In the morning, track would be easy. The bear was a target that no four guns could miss. And Nathan knew that if he was to pay the debt he owed the bear he must not lose an instant's time.

"Old fellow," he said softly to the darkness, "old boy what saved my life! I'll save you if I can. But how can I! Lord, how can I do it?"

For there seemed to be no way. He did not own the valley. He could not keep out hunters. The great bullets from the modern rifles were invincible, even against such armor of fur as Adam wore. They could trace him easily in the snow, using the dead steer as a starting point. If he tried to hold them back and restrict them, they would be sure to recoginze him as the renegade of years before. Wells, particularly, would know him. But the naturalist drove this thought from his mind at once. By the stern code of the hills by which he lived personal safety and considerations must not be allowed to count! He resolved that not even the prospect of three months in the dreary jail would keep him from saving the bear's life, if it was in his power.

But the game seemed hopeless. He had no claim on the bear. The only way that he could establish a claim would be to trap the animal before the hunters came—and for a moment his heart beat with hope at the thought. Then he despaired again, for he had no bear traps. No man that he knew, in all the hills, had traps for catching such creatures as Adam. And even if he was able to procure a trap, and bait and set it beside the fallen bull, his purpose would be defeated after all. For such a free, wild creature as was Adam would bite off his own great foot rather than be held in a trap. Besides, the wary old bear knew the human smell as far as the wind blew.

He returned, dejected, to his cabin, and for a long hour he sat beside his fire. There seemed to be no way out. The hours were speeding, and even now word was being passed among the lower settlements of a great bear hunt on the morrow.

"Old boy," he muttered at last. "Big bear that I saw grow up, I guess you have to die to-morrow. Die, without leaving any of your kind! And what will this valley be without you. Damn the place!"

He sat another ten minutes, in deep thought. "The monarch of all the woods, the last of his great line, to die like a hog from a bullet not as large as his smallest fang! A bullet shot by such as Wells and his gang—such carrion as Adam would be too proud to eat! And I can't save you. I don't even know any one that I can ask

for help, except crazy Dick—no one but poor, crazy Dick——"

Then all at once a thought leaped into his wondering mind, astounding in its boldness and originality. For a moment he sat perfectly still. The fire crackled merrily. The snow fell in silence on his roof. And his tired eyes grew suddenly bright—as bright as those of the wild things that were his life.

He leaped up, and began to put on his heavy coat. He crammed a sandwich into his mouth, the same time looking for his watch. Old Dick—poor, crazy Dick! He might be their salvation, after all.

In scarcely two minutes after the thought had occurred to him, he was out in the silence and snow, speeding down the ridges. He walked with the free stride of a mountaineer, the long stride that seems to eat up the long miles faster than the mind can follow.

Over the snow-swept hills he walked, and the deer sprang from the thicket as he passed. He did not even glance at them. The grouse flung up with a thunder and whir; and once a lean wolf dashed from his path. He surmounted the ridge, and skirted the creek bed, leaping the logs like a boy. The shadows of twilight came down and covered him; and the great hills stood bathing in the snow. Darkness followed, like a blanket, but he did not check his pace. He knew the hills by the feel; he could tell, with the certainty of an animal, what rock was safe to stand upon and what would send him reeling below to his death. He followed narrow trails that less-experienced woodsmen could have scarcely encompassed in daytime. He mounted fallen logs and forced his way through thickets. And in a little while he was at the door of a cabin, at the outer edge of Beyond.

He told the chattering creature in the doorway why he had come, and what he wanted.

"But why—but why so much?" the faltering voice asked. He peered with wild, narrowed eyes. "Is it *blood?*"

Nathan explained, and in a moment more was on his way home. It was a more arduous journey, the return. Most of it was uphill. But the snow, or the darkness, or fatigue, or the many noises of the waste place did not retard his step at all. Some time after midnight he reached his cabin door.

But he was not done yet. He went out into his little pantry and procured a dripping piece of honeycomb, filled with its golden treasure. Very cleverly and slowly he scooped out part of its center and, after a moment, sealed it up with another piece of comb. It was the bear's portion for tomorrow, if it was ordained that he should reach the tree before the hunters overtook him. Once more he stepped out into the darkness and snow, and made his way to the bee tree where Adamzad had fought for the mastery of the valley, years before. He slipped the honeycomb into the accustomed place.

Then he went back, anxious but light of heart, to his cabin.

VI.

The snow was two inches deep over the whole wilderness world when the morning broke. At the first gray of dawn the hunters, led by the untiring Wells, had started up from the settlements.

They trudged up the long slope, every man armed with a big-game rifle. They were a determined, deadly band. Wells felt that he had many old debts to pay the ruler of Beyond. The rest followed him mostly for the fun and excitement of the chase.

The morning was perfect for tracking. They saw the trail of the snowshoe rabbit, criss-crossing on their path, and here a covey of mountain quail had found shelter beneath a fir. Soon they began to see the tracks of deer, little triangles in the snow, and once the imprint of a black bear caused a moment's halt. On they sped, along the lake, and over the ridges. A little while before noon they came to the valley of Beyond.

They did not halt to seek aimlessly the grizzly's tracks. They kept on to the barren hillside where the bull had been killed. And yes—distinct and enormous in the snow, the great grizzly had left his mark.

It was a trail that the poorest tracker could follow with ease. He had made the track but an hour or two before; and the hunters grew tense and still as they filed away down the grade. They did not know when the vast gray form would rear from the underbrush. Their guns were all loaded, all ready.

The vast imprints, almost as large as those made by a pair of snowshoes, kept

steadily down the ridge and across the glade, disappearing into the brush thickets.

Through the window of his cabin Nathan watched the bee tree. The early morning hours dragged away; and still the vast creature did not come. Had the hunters overtaken him, already? Was his great body lying somewhere in the snow, the muscles already rigid in death? Had the mighty king of the wilderness fallen at last? And there were none to receive his scepter, none to inherit.

He waited, every nerve alert. He dreaded, every moment, the sharp crack of a rifle somewhere in the fastnesses. To die before such a hunter as Wells!

It was just that moment that the grizzly emerged from the brush. Vast, he seemed —the very embodiment of the rugged strength and glory of the wild places. He came out boldly, for who lived in his valley to question him? "Woof!" he grunted. With a cry of relief and joy, Nathan leaped back to his post.

"Oh, you wonderful old sinner," the naturalist exulted. "But hurry, hurry! I'm afraid they'll overtake you any minute."

With exasperating leisure, the bear approached the tree. Once it seemed as if he meant to turn aside, and Nathan sweated in suspense. He came nearer, ever nearer. Now he was smelling at the tree. Now he stood upright, and his great paw was reaching into the hollow place. And the next instant the entire comb was in his mouth and down his throat.

Tensely, the man waited. Would the plan fail, after all? Was the huge body impervious to even such a mode of attack as this? As he watched, a queer bewilderment seemed to overtake the bear. He began to turn round and round, like a thing in a crazy dance. He howled dismally.

Down in the valley the hunters heard that sound. It reverberated through the snowy aisles of the tree trunks; and every man started and gripped his gun the tighter. Nathan heard it, and smiled a little grimly. As he gazed, the bear seemed to stagger in his dance. And all at once, like a tree falls, the bear rolled over on his side.

Nathan put a length of the great chain about the enormous head, and quickly fastened the other end of it to the trunk of a pine. Then he turned, with a cry of triumph on his lips. What did he care now for Wells! Even the vision of the gray walls of a prison could not depress him now.

He had been none too soon. For even now the hunters were breaking from the thickets. They stopped short with amazement.

For a long breath not one of them understood. For here was their game at last, lying still in the snow. But strangely, a watch stood over him; and more strange still, the bear was chained to a tree like a captive thing. And the man beside him, with a long rifle lying suggestively across his arms, stood very calm and straight.

Wells was the first to absorb the situation. "What you doin'?" he screamed in fury. "That's our bear!"

"You're mistaken," a cool voice answered. "And the first man that shoots at him is going to get shot himself—right between the eyes!"

"What do you mean?" Wells yelled. "You devil, we've chased that bear all morning. I tell you I'm goin' to shoot him."

"Don't, that's all." The voice was annoyingly cool and steady. "It's been a chase, and I'm sorry—but I got him first. I caught him not ten minutes past, and I mean to keep him. And, gentlemen—I'm never known to miss at the range you stand."

But Wells was off on another scent by now. He had peered intently at the brown face before him; and all at once his eyes grew narrow and cruel.

"It's his bear, is it!" he replied. "We'll see about that." Then he turned to the naturalist. "And as for you—I give you just two minutes to let us have that bear."

"Then what do you mean to do?"

"Do! I'll show you! Don't you think I know you, you jailbreaker? You're Nat Funk, who got away from jail when I 'rested you in nineteen hundred and three. You'll give us that bear—or else you'll go back and stand your sentence. And you have just two minutes to decide."

"I don't need two seconds," was the quick reply. "You can't have the bear."

The young rancher who had interposed before was somewhat disgusted by now with his leader's lack of sportsmanship. "Don't be a fool," he urged. "It's his bear, and I'm goin' home. Besides, how long ago did that jail-break happen?"

"In October, nineteen hundred and three —he shot an elk after sunset."

"In nineteen hundred and three, huh? Come on home, you fool. In this State the statute of limitations clears a man after ten years—he's been safe for five years back." Then he turned to Nathan. "He's your bear, old sport. We grant the point. But say—before we go, I do wish you'd tell us how you caught him and mesmerized him. From the looks of that bull back there, I'd say he's no parlor pet. And what do you mean to do with the old rascal? He'll eat you out o' house and home."

The speech ended the suspense, and the naturalist laughed aloud. "I doped the old devil, in a lump o' honey," he answered joyously. "I put up a game on him, with some knock-out powders. And what do I mean to do? Why, stranger, I've got a mine back of my cabin. It's just a pocket, but it's got twenty thousand in it, if a cent. Until I get that out of the ground, we're goin' to live right here. Then I'm goin' to buy a circus cage—and a steamship ticket."

"But what in heaven's name do you want with a circus cage and a steamship ticket?" the other asked.

"Why? I'll tell you why. We're goin' to some region where there's other grizzlies, up north somewheres. This place is too populous for him 'n' me. We're goin' where this old boy can get what's comin' to him. He ain't goin' to be the last of his line no more." He turned, with singular delight, to the great, huge shape of gray. "And see, see! He's wakin' up this minute."

Six months later, when spring danced back to the valley, it caressed with the same gentleness a wild and remote island, far in the north Pacific. On this island, in a tavern, one cold spring night found a group of men sitting about a table, clad in snug Mackinaws. They were outdoor men, grizzled and hairy. One of them, who looked the youngest because of the youthful light in his gray eyes, was just finishing a story.

"Yes," said he, "I got him up here at last, in a rhinocerous cage that I bought from a busted circus. I admit it cost me a heap o' dough, but it ain't as foolish as it looks. I got enough out o' that old mine to do it easy, and fix me up good besides for the rest of my life.

"Of course the old boy didn't know it, at first. So I grabbed hold of the end of the rope I had tied to the door, and waitin' at the base of a big tree, I give it a pull. And for a minute the old cuss wouldn't believe he was really free. Free! That's what he was. It's a big word, strangers. He was free to live his life, as was meant for him to do.

"'Woof!' he said as he stuck out his old head. 'Woof.' And he came out, smellin' the air. Then he seen me.

"And what do you suppose the old devil did?" Nathan's eyes brightened with delight. "In spite of all I'd done for the old cuss, as soon as he seen me he took after me. I had to skin up that tree like a good one, and he reached for the seat of my pants. He missed me though, and gave a little growl.

"'Good-by, old boy,' I told him.

"He turned and looked up at me. Sure as I'm settin' here, he looked up at me with the most curious look. It was as if he was sayin' good-by, too. He smelled the wild, and 'way off, far into the island, he smelled bears of his own kind. He just seemed to smile, strangers. That he did! If a bear ever smiled in the world, that was what my big old Adam did.

"Then he started out, and I watched him."

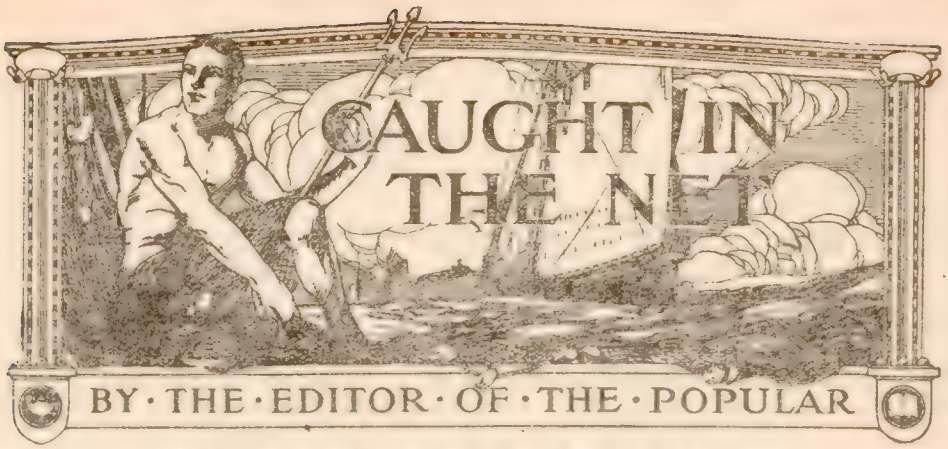
The naturalist paused.

"Me?" he said at last, recalling his wandering thoughts. "Oh, I'm all right. I got a good poke out o' that mine—enough to supply my wants—and I'm livin' up here, too, to kind o' watch out for my old bear. Of course there ain't much chance—but still I'm hopin' to see him ag'in some time. Mark my words—he'll be king of all the bears up here. It's his life, just as he was meant to do. And it's my life, too."

The story ended; and the tavern was still. The men who had heard the story were witnessing, in fancy, that farewell in the remote wastes of the island—the sight of the great bear striding away to join his kind. They saw the gray sky, the forests, and the hills, and the swinging door of the empty cage. There was just one detail that they missed.

This detail had been Nathan's face, as the shadows of the island hid his bear. For the lips, usually firm and straight, were trembling as might a woman's, and tears were running down his cheeks.

Another story by Marshall will be in the next issue. It is called "The Mole."



THE DECLINE OF PARLIAMENTS

PARLIAMENTARY government is on the defensive. The signs of the times in America as in Europe are interpreted by publicists to show a marked and ominous decline of faith in legislatures of all kinds, and this wave of doubt may threaten the very existence of democracy. In the United States the action of Congress in adjourning without necessary appropriations early last spring, and the course of the Senate toward the League of Nations are pointed to by some observers as the most striking of recent evidences of parliamentary inefficiency, while others say the passage of the war-time prohibition act after the armistice is also a sign of incompetence.

At the last general election in Great Britain nearly one-half of the electorate stayed away from the polls. Several Labor candidates during the election found themselves without followers. The voters no longer believed in parliaments. They preferred to "let (Lloyd) George do it," as many American voters seem inclined to prefer an executive who does to a Congress which does not. Parliaments have ceased, so the charge runs, to represent. They have become too respectable, too timid, too slow. Also, it is being charged in the most eminent reviews in England that directorships and shares in public-service corporations, breweries, and other private concerns influence the lawmakers not to serve the public interest.

In all of the great revolutions of the nineteenth century, the faith and hope of the people were centered on parliaments. There were doubting voices. Carlyle scoffed, and Socialism burrowed. Liberal Germany wrestled with Bismarck for a free parliament, and got the shadow in the Reichstag. Austria, too, got her Reichsrath, and Hungary almost achieved the separate parliament for which she strove. The fire of this great zeal burned until the twentieth century. The Duma was born in 1905 as a concession to the first Russian revolution. It died, was reborn, and died again. The Constituent Assembly, its successor, is also gone. "Revolutions, like Saturn, devour their own children," said Carlyle. Though there is now a national assembly at Weimar, its life is one long, fitful fever. The real German government is a fighting executive with an army. In Hungary, the parliament has disappeared, in Bavaria it is a wandering exile.

Commissions are largely taking the place of parliamentary action in England and the United States. Food and trade and tariff and commerce and labor commissions are among the evidences of this at Washington.

OWNERSHIP OF HOMES

EXPERT real-estate authorities estimate that the country is short something like a million homes, and it is urged upon those who want to build but stand hesitating that they get busy with the carrying out of such plans before the winter sets in.

Opportunity is also taken to interest the wage earner in owning his home, and many of our big corporations are devising ways in which to help their workers in this direction.

From reliable sources of information comes the arresting statement that approximately three-fourths of American-born wage-earners' families live in rented houses. Inadequate pay might be considered the reason for this except that some of the foreign-born workers are owners of property to a degree which would prove such argument false. With the exception of the English-born wage-earner, who does not appear to invest in real estate to any extent, the foreign-born workers outnumber the native-born in the ownership of homes. The percentage of home-owning heads of families from northern Europe, including Ireland and Scotland, ranges from thirty to seventy per cent, while even the Croatian, North Italian, and Slovenian immigrants show a greater percentage of property holders than do our native-born white workers.

It is worthy of note that in some of the older industrial localities where occupations are fixed and where labor is not "floating" there is decided tendency toward home-owning. This is particularly the case in the industrial communities of towns and the smaller cities. In the larger cities the percentage of home-owning workingmen's families is negligible. Not so long ago, the Federal Immigration Commission's investigation of more than 10,000 households in the congested districts of some of the greater American cities revealed that only about one-tenth of the workers' families lived in their own homes. The New York tenement districts disclosed that only one-half of one per cent of the dwellers lived in houses of their own. Milwaukee, on the other hand, showed that nineteen per cent of its workingmen's families were home owners. Buffalo had 17.5 per cent. Chicago had over 16 per cent. Boston lined up with only 4.4 per cent. Philadelphia had 7.4 per cent of home owners among the workingmen.

Another point worth making is that in the forthcoming building of homes we hope there will be an effort made toward artistic architecture and differentiation of structure. There is no reason why the home of the workingman should be ugly. Money need not control beauty.

DUELS

THE sporting world was promised a new thrill when Corporal Leon Vaudecrane and Captain Robert Schreiber, of the French army aviation corps, booked themselves for the first aërial duel in history.

Both are editors and their animosity is much like the quarrels of rival American editors of a half century ago. Older readers will recall the famous double-barreled pistol encounter between editors George C. Harding and Sol Hathaway, in the days when Indianapolis was the last chance for a fling among men going West.

The proposed duel in the air was slated to take place shortly after the signing of the peace treaty. Seconds were to attend, each in his own machine.

The duel, long since forbidden by legislation in all civilized countries, except among the military caste of Germany and Russia, was originally an appeal from unsatisfactory court decisions to personal reckoning. It found its greatest favor in France, where the kings welcomed it as an easy method of keeping court dockets from becoming clogged.

The historic challenge of Francis I. to his rival, Charles V., in 1528, really gave dueling its vogue. Immediately—since the nobility set popular styles—the average man felt called upon at slightest provocation to try out his sword.

A century later the practice had become such an evil that apprehended duelists were executed, then suspended face downward and naked from the gallows, to exercise a restraining influence on the morbidly curious populace. Most duels thereafter were held at dawn.

The first duel in this country was staged at Plymouth, in 1621, by two servants. About a hundred years afterward a young fellow named Phillips was killed in pistol combat, with seconds attending, on Boston Common. Our history, however, records but few notable duels. Leading them was the encounter between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. In the frontier days of the West, when Wild Bill Hickok and Billy the Kid held forth, arguments were frequently settled via the short-cut method of six-shooters, but they were not of sufficient import to become historic.

The Duke of Wellington, who forbade duels under strict penalty, was once approached by two officers who appealed for permission to fight it out among themselves.

"Certainly, gentlemen," responded the duke genially. As they turned away much gratified, he added: "But be sure you both get killed, for I'll hang the survivor an hour later."

The story ends there—so did the duel.

ANIMALS IN FACT AND FICTION

WE have had horses and dogs in some of our stories that seemed almost too human in their thinking and action. And we remember an elephant, a monkey, and a yoke of oxen that played important rôles. Also a burro and a buffalo. But so far as we can recall, the tale of the grizzly in this issue is the first one we have had featuring that animal as a chief character.

No doubt there have been readers who were skeptical about the deeds done by some of our hero animals, and perhaps we ourselves doubted the intelligence of the beasts as described by our imaginative writers, and for that reason we were glad to come across a recent book by Enos A. Mills called "The Grizzly," which gave us an opportunity to compare fact with fiction.

From direct observation Mr. Mills declares that the grizzly is one of the most sagacious and good-natured members of the animal kingdom, and, contrary to general belief, he will not attack a man unless frightened or worried into such action. Indeed, according to the naturalist, the bear is rather friendly to man in a cautious way and is not naturally hostile unless his species has been hunted in the region of their habitat.

Grizzlies are very playful. Mr. Mills says he has seen them coasting down the snow-covered sides of a mountain, enjoying the sport like healthy youngsters. And they have been known to sneak up on camps and dash through them with a great uproar apparently just to scare the parties. Grizzlies will chase shadows, play in the stream with a log, and run after their tails. They are expert in getting the contents out of a can or bottle. Mr. Mills cites the cleverness of a cub owned by him when a dog, aware that the bear was chained, brought a tempting bone just out of reach, and after the cub had tried in vain to get it with his forepaws he suddenly wheeled about and with his hind foot scraped the tidbit within easy grasp.

One of Mr. Mills' most striking observations we will give in his own words. This time he watched a grizzly in native haunts. The big fellow was busy digging in a rock slide for small game, and he had tossed out big slabs of rock until they were piled up nearly as high as his head.

"Then he began piling the stones upon the edge of his deepening hole," says Mr. Mills. "The slope was steep and the stones had to be placed with care to prevent their tumbling back. After lifting into place one huge slab he stood and looked at it for an instant, and then slightly changed his position. On top of this stone he piled another large one, eyed it closely, shook it to see if it were solid, and finally shifted it a trifle. Had he not been wearing a grizzly bear coat it would have been easy to believe that a powerful, careful, thoughtful man was eagerly digging that hole."

AN AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR JAPAN

ONE of the signs that the United States is a world power, and must live up to its new rôle, is the plan for a school for American children in Japan. Here is the problem and the way Americans in the Mikado's land and their friends here, backed by the American Asiatic Association, are trying to solve it, as told by Professor J. T. Swift, president of the American Association of Tokyo:

"At a semiofficial banquet in Tokyo, a leading Japanese publicist said: 'We understand America, but America does not understand us. We have thousands of young men who have been educated in American schools and colleges, while you Americans have scarcely a half dozen men who know enough of the Japanese language to understand Japanese thought at first hand.'"

Japan is the strongest American position in the East. There are already three hundred children in Tokyo and other cities of the empire who would attend such a school as planned if it were open now. Instead, these American children, at the most impression-

able period of life, must be sent at great expense to the United States to study, and in the several years thus spent away from the country in which their parents desire them to find careers, lose much of their interest in and knowledge of the language and life of the Japanese.

Our consular service was recently in pressing need of eight men, but none could be found who knew enough of the language to qualify. There are no confidential agents of this government in Japan, while Japanese who know English perfectly are known to be numerous in the United States. Almost every day American heads of firms are called upon to sign powers of attorney made out in Japanese ideographs which they and their American staffs cannot read. It was not by accident that the Germans interned in Japan studied Japanese. Rather, it was in line with the school for German children that the German government had in Yokohama at the beginning of the war. Japan maintains in Hawaii one hundred and thirty-seven schools, attended by fourteen thousand children.

India has hundreds of schools, from primary to university, where children of British parents may learn the language alongside of native pupils. The system was established in 1854 under the direction of Lord Halifax. American churches have invested three million dollars in ten large mission schools exclusively for the Japanese, and four hundred thousand dollars annually are spent on these schools.

MAKING THE CHILDREN WORK

ONE of the worst blots on the American industrial 'scutcheon has been the employment of children. That the Peace Treaty of Versailles promised to take up the matter was a cause for rejoicing. When the 1920 census is given to the public it is to be hoped that this industrial servitude will have ceased to all practical purposes. To emphasize this wish let us remind ourselves of the statistics in the last census of 1910 relative to the employment of children.

According to that tabulation there were 1,990,225 children of both sexes between the ages of ten and fifteen who were gainfully employed at that time. They constituted almost twelve per cent of all persons gainfully employed in agricultural pursuits and slightly more than two per cent of those otherwise engaged in gainful occupations. Of these children 895,946 were less than fourteen years of age. Of those between the ages of ten and thirteen, 609,030 were boys and 286,946 were girls. Nearly 17,000 boys under sixteen were working in coal and iron-ore mines and quarries, and about 2,000 of these were between the ages of ten and thirteen. The industries in which children under sixteen were employed in the greatest numbers were clothing, shoe factories, bakeries, candy, hat, collar, shirt, and cuff factories, slaughtering and meat-packing houses, blast furnaces and steel mills, saw and planing mills, printing and publishing establishments, cotton mills, telegraph and telephones, banking and brokerage houses, cigar and tobacco factories, silk, knitting, and woolen mills. But by all odds the greatest number of children were at work in mercantile establishments and textile mills.

A society that tolerates the labor of little girls and boys may be encouraging independence and self-reliance in them, but it is also encouraging influences to play upon these qualities which may make them powers for evil instead of for good.

POPULAR TOPICS

INTERNATIONAL commerce of the world for the year 1918 will approximate $60,000,000,000 against $53,000,000,000 in 1917, $47,000,000,000 in 1916, $40,000,000,000 in 1915, and $20,000,000,000 in 1901. Nearly half of the $60,000,000,000 for 1918 was handled by the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Canada, and Japan. The 1918 trade of the United States alone was more than $9,000,000,000, that of the United Kingdom almost as much, while France had about half that figure, Italy over $3,000,000,000, Canada and Japan about $2,000,000,000 each. These estimates were based on the trade of twenty countries and partial trade figures of other lands. The National City Bank of New York is our authority in the matter.

JUDGING from votes taken by those who know most concerning its desirability, the United States coast guard ought to be transferred from the treasury department to the navy department. The change has been projected and discussed and put before Congress in the regular way, but there has been the inevitable delay. It seems only proper and right that the coast guard come under the jurisdiction of the navy, and we hope the change will be made. The sentiment of the coast guard service is strong for it. A general vote taken returned the following: Favoring amalgamation with the navy, three hundred and thirty-nine; opposing it, forty-four; undecided, seven.

WHAT wages ought to be, and what they are, is one of the burning questions of the present day. Labor in general and the unions in particular know how to take care of themselves. But there are some "polite" workers who are more or less helpless in their own class and must perforce appeal to the public. Two such pleas are handed us. One for post-office clerks betterment in salary, the other for school-teachers. Reading their briefs we are astonished at what they must know to hold their jobs and what they are paid for such knowledge. For instance, the post-office memoranda states: "The post-office clerk is among the most skilled of skilled workers, comparing favorably with many of the professions. Upon entering the service he is required to commit to memory a scheme of distribution comprising from 10,000 to 25,000 separate and distinct notations or facts." And for this his salary ranges from $1,000 to $1,500 a year. The school-teachers as a class fare even worse. In some places they are paid pretty well, but in many places they get much too little. Thus according to the report of the commissioner of education, the average salary paid teachers in the United States has increased from $531.31 in 1915 to $630.64 in 1918. Of 191 cities reporting definite increases for elementary teachers during 1918-19, 86 per cent of them gave increases of $50 or less.

NOW let us consider some salaries under the Russian Soviet, of course making the proper allowance that an American dollar is probably worth ten times the value of the same amount in their money. Under their grandiose wage scale errand boys and unskilled light laborers receive $300 a month; telephone operators, $405; clerks, $425; attorneys are paid from $755 to $1,010 a month; editors and writers get from $300 to $600 for the same period.

BUT the Osage Indians have them all "skinned a mile." Just compare their easy money to that of the Russian Soviet worker. The Osages number about 2,000 individuals. Their Uncle Sam sees to it that their land, become rich in petroleum, yields them great profits without the lifting of a finger on their part. It is calculated that each of the Osages gets in this way an income of $5,000 annually, and with the future prospect of oil on their territory some of them may find rank in the millionaire class. We wonder what the Bolshevists would say to this treatment of the red proletariat under a bourgeois government?

SOUTH AMERICA promises to be the arena of great commercial and industrial battles. The nations are girding up their loins for the trial of wit and goods. England and Germany both have a strong position in the southern half of the Americas. And Japan is planning an elaborate colonization scheme for that part of the world. Even Belgium, we are told, is busy in that direction. But men who have spent their lives in South American trade are of the conviction that the United States stands the best chance of all of them, if only the opportunity is seized and sealed in a friendly spirit. The employment of American technical men in South America is eagerly sought by the authorities in the various Latin-American lands, and our engineers and others have a wonderful world open to them.

Aladdin and His Wonderful Cramp

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Burglary While You Wait," Etc.

The keynote of this yarn is struck cleverly in the very first line: "He fished for a livelihood with the line of least resistance"

HE fished for a livelihood with the line of least resistance. To carry the metaphor to a weary conclusion, he thought he had a bite and pulled in, only to find that his line had snagged another line—the bread line.

There's only one way to do it—dive right into the story.

J. Corkle Thubbs was a young man who, finding himself a failure at the feeble age of thirty years, gazed drearily upon life from the sunny side of a park bench. Being broke and shabby, he assured himself that he could not get work to which his ability and intelligence entitled him, and he would not accept work which was beneath his ability and intelligence. He was too smart for shabby work and too shabby for smart work.

He clung to his park bench as tenaciously as a wisp of garlic in a hallway. In that he had unbending will power, but in reality J. Corkle Thubbs was one of those weak-willed young men who flip coins with themselves to see whether or not they shall do something which they know blamed well they shouldn't do.

He had come to the city two years before with a bank roll, and he had squandered it while in quest of the elusive "double-W"—Workless Work. He had played a tune on every cash register along Broadway and paid clinking tribute to hovering menials. He had seen more upturned palms than all the clairvoyants in the city.

Shabbiness came upon him almost before he knew it, so gay was his life, and he still clung to the skirts of Broadway, drinking when he could and eating when he could and sometimes when he shouldn't. He had been buffeted away from all the buffet lunches in the district—and he did not think of the word as "boo-fay" any more.

It had been his habit to linger on Broadway until she began to don the drab garb of early morning. He liked to see her lie down with a little too much wine aboard, as gay as a pink ribbon on the frock of a Quaker girl. He liked to see her toss as the sparkle of wine died and to hear her breathe fitfully in the swishing roar of subway trains beneath and snore loudly in the gasping of taxicabs and clattering of surface cars. When the dazzle of electricity began to pale and the dreariness of an Aztec cemetery settled upon the Gay White Way, J. Corkle Thubbs would glide away to a park bench, or sometimes a lodging house; and, sober, dream he was drunk, or, drunk, dream himself to soberness.

But on this particular night he was quite weary and retired early on a park bench. It was one of those benches on which seats are spaced off with iron arms eighteen inches apart. He chose this because it was in a secluded spot and the officer on the beat never came near it. This night he had draped his loose and lean anatomy over these arms in a series of contortions, like an eel with the colic. It was very uncomfortable, but J. Corkle Thubbs was very tired.

The bench sat within a little copse of shrubbery and J. Corkle knew not how long he had slumbered when a cold wind sneaked in and shook his coverlet of Indian-summer atmosphere. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, and wondered why he had left such an early call.

He tried, sitting slumped down into his upturned coat collar, to catch a few more winks of sleep, but it was impossible. The cold was upon him like an intermittent alarm clock, so he arose, stiffly, thinking he would walk over to Broadway. It was then that he observed a man sitting in an end seat on the bench.

J. Corkle Thubbs was somewhat startled

but not alarmed. There was nothing strange in another loiterer seeking out this bench, and he was about to move out into the park pathway when the man spoke—spoke in a voice rather sharp and quick but not at all unpleasant.

"Hello, my friend," said he. "Are you cold?"

"I'm quite chilly," said Thubbs. "This is a quick change—a little quicker than I anticipated."

Whereupon the stranger got to his feet and gazed intently into the face of J. Corkle Thubbs. Thubbs himself took occasion to observe that the man was well dressed, wearing a light overcoat; under the patches of light sifting into the copse he could see the polish of his shoes glisten. There was nothing about this man to suggest the park loiterer. Although Thubbs had lain down befuddled by many beers—this story transpired before they took the bee out of beer—he was quite sure the other man had not been drinking. It was very strange, thought the younger man, that he should be whiling away time on a park bench when it had turned so cold. The stranger's scrutiny lasted but a few moments.

"He's sober," he declared reflectively, speaking aloud but nevertheless to himself. "And he's young. I think he'll do." He seemed to come sharply to himself and to realize that he was uttering what he only intended to be thoughts. "Sit down a few minutes, my friend," he urged. "I've something to say which may pay you well, and this is the best place to say it."

J. Corkle Thubbs, having caught the word "pay" above all others, complied with the request and the stranger sat down beside him.

"You—you are out of a job, I take it?" he began, speaking softly in an apparent effort to cull the element of offense from his assumption.

"I am," answered the man who hadn't been *in* a job for a long time.

"Well," pursued the stranger, "I've got to have a man to help me out in a little transaction. I promise you there is no danger involved; do—do you want to earn a handsome bit of money—with very little to do?"

"I would like that, sir," said J. Corkle Thubbs earnestly.

"And would you be willing to take things like a good sport and not be inquisitive about matters that might, at first, appear strange?"

J. Corkle Thubbs had adventure in his indolent soul and he was not a coward. In fact, recklessness was one of his traits, so his answer came quickly.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Even," his interrogator pressed on, lowering his voice and bending an inquiring face still closer, "even to permitting yourself to be blindfolded for a time—until we can get to my home?"

J. Corkle Thubbs hesitated at this, but not for long. His need of money was very great.

"Yes," he gulped, licking his lips.

"And you will follow without question all my instructions?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll trust you," the stranger announced after a moment's thought, "but at the first sign of wavering, I shall quit you—and you'll lose your big chance for easy money."

"I'll not waver," said Thubbs solemnly.

"Then," the other commanded, rising, "turn your coat collar down and come with me. Your first task will be to act like a drunken man—not too drunk; just lurch around a little bit." They left the copse, arm in arm. "That's it," the stranger said. He led J. Corkle Thubbs to the edge of the park and flung himself into a taxicab.

"Drive us around the city," he said to the driver, "uptown and crosstown, any old way—only mix 'em up a little. Then drive back to——" He gave a number in the upper Fifties, only a few blocks from where they stood now. "My friend," he added, carelessly explanatory, "is a little to the bad and needs the air before he goes home."

The driver nodded wisely. Once in the taxicab, the stranger blindfolded Thubbs with a kid glove and a handkerchief, and in a few minutes he was as bewildered as though he were catapulting through space. The man adjusted his slouch hat so that only a close scrutiny would reveal the blindfold. After a ride of an hour, during which the stranger now and then whispered instructions, Thubbs had an idea he was far uptown, but in reality the machine had stopped before a large flat-faced house in the upper Fifties. It was quite dark and, as he had been told, Thubbs wandered away from the machine while the other man paid the bill.

It was one of those old residences, fash-

ionable in their day but now given over to furnished rooms and light housekeeping suites, and, the driver dismissed, J. Corkle Thubbs was led up a long flight of cracked stone steps to the front door.

Ushered into a suite on the second floor, the glove and handkerchief were taken off his eyes and he found himself in the presence of two men; one the man who had brought him thither. Thubbs sized up the men, as they did him. They did not look dangerous. No word was uttered yet.

J. Corkle Thubbs had an idea that something strange was going to happen him, but he was not frightened. His companions had a way of reassuring him merely by smiling pleasantly.

The suite consisted of a living room, a bedroom with two beds, a kitchenette, and a bathroom. The ceilings were very high and the rooms spacious—the way they built houses in older days.

In the living room a long marble mantelpiece jutted above an old and disused fireplace, the wide maw of which was screened by sheet iron. Cut into the wall beside this fireplace was a grated hole, six by six inches square, which stood most of the year with bated breath, as though in awe of the gloomy aristocracy of the great room, but which, when the weather grew real cold, respired feebly, like a very old dog which has crawled in his kennel to die. This hole, which had some sort of connection but no definite understanding with the extinct volcano in the basement and which shrunk in scorn, from the capacious and once-cheerful fireplace, was a justification for the word "modern" in the advertisements with which the landlady lured tenants.

The chandeliers, modernized for electricity, still bore the design and form of other days. The wrinkles of age were everywhere, but the great room held an air of departed splendor but cherished respectability, like proud old folks grown poor.

The first thing his hosts did with J. Corkle Thubbs was to feed him. While placing before him bread, cold meat, and beer, they explained that a servant kept house for them by day, preparing their breakfasts and dinners—but of course they couldn't cook, and would he please excuse the rather scrappy lunch? His hosts need not concern themselves on that score at all, he assured them—the lunch, or rather subbreakfast, for it was very late, was all that could be desired, and he felt great pleasure in the honor of being their guest. The instincts of breeding were with Mr. Thubbs and he could not fall upon the food, as ravenous as he was, without ceremony. He felt uneasy over the fact that the gentlemen had not introduced themselves by any names whatever, and he ventured to suggest this.

"My name," said he, "is J. Corkle Thubbs, as yet in the wake of fame, but with prospects—and I have the honor to be the guest of——"

"If Mr. Thubbs will pardon us," spoke the man he had met in the park, "we must beg that that formality be dispensed with until we have had time for further talk." The guest bowed his acquiescence. "It's rather an unusual proceeding, I will admit," the host went on, "but this whole situation is unusual—and I'm sure you will see that our request is justified when things have been made more clear. We could, of course, stoop to the subterfuge of assumed names for the moment, but that is unnecessary between gentlemen. And now, you will pardon us for not having something with you, I'm sure, but it hasn't been long since our supper."

Mr. Thubbs thereupon bowed an "As you will, sir," and proceeded to the food. He restrained any desire he might have had to hasten but he set at rest any worry as to quality of offering by quantity of consumption.

He came to the end of his repast and lighted a proffered cigarette. In a few moments, seated in the full glow of the electric lights, the guest found himself undergoing an oral examination by one of the men and the object of a critical surveillance from the other.

The man who questioned him was slow of speech and heavy of voice. In fact, he was slow and heavy of movement—he walked slowly, gravely, in the manner of pallbearers. He was a large man, inclined to corpulency, though not fat. He was slightly bald and may have been fifty years old. He wore a ragged black mustache. His face was somber but not unkind—not at all displeasing.

The other man, the one he had first met, was younger, forty, perhaps; tall and straight and with an alacrity of movement and sharpness of eye suggesting the brisk business man. His face was inscrutable, like

a man raising the pot with four diamonds showing and a spade in the hole. His features were lean but there was nothing about this man, either, to inspire distrust. His rather long hair was brushed straight back from the forehead—imparting an artistic note.

Both were clad simply though with a taste that betokened means. There was a certain rough-and-readiness about the older man, visible in garments not scrupulously pressed; something about him which gave the impression of a sturdy son of the soil suddenly become rich. The young man's dress displayed discriminating simplicity—immaculate from head to foot. J. Corkle Thubbs was conscious of a liking for both his hosts.

"Do you believe in any such thing as luck?" was the first question of the young man's solemn interrogator.

"Luck," replied J. Corkle Thubbs, who was something of a pessimist. "Luck is the good that happens to others and the bad that happens to ourselves. The bad that happens to others is the just penalty of their shortcomings—the good that comes to ourselves is the just reward of merit."

"I see you have not gone through life without reflection," the other commented, smiling; smiling, no doubt, at finding Thubbs possessed of a gift of gab. "According to your philosophy, you must have contributed much good to the world, for opportunity of big reward has come to you now."

"No doubt it is fate's tardy recognition of merit," observed J. Corkle Thubbs solemnly; without the remnant of a smile to soften the egotism of his words.

"No doubt—no doubt," agreed his questioner. "Now then, something or other—luck, fate, or whatever you want to call it—has thrown us together to-night; and we might as well get down to business. You—if you will pardon the assumption—you have no home?"

"I have no home in the city, sir," Thubbs assured him, falling into the formula he prescribed for bartenders and prospective benefactors, "but my family is one of the oldest and wealthiest in—out of respect for them, sir, I'll not reveal the location of my family estate. I am temporarily without funds, although I have good prospects; next week, I should say. I could end my troubles and step into untold luxury if I wished to return and acknowledge to my homefolks that the city had defeated me—but my pride, sir, my pride——"

"I see—I understand," interjected the other, rubbing his wide chin reflectively. "Well, now—that may interfere with our plans. I didn't think of the possibility of your having a family."

J. Corkle Thubbs was seized with a pang of alarm. His "family" was as real as Santa Claus, and he feared he had knocked his own fortunes by his desire to boast.

"I don't see how my family," he began, "could——"

Both men gazed at him searchingly. The older man spoke more slowly than ever and did not take his eyes from the face of J. Corkle Thubbs.

"This," said he, "is no time for idle talk. Tell me the truth, for it will make a vast difference with your own affairs—have you a family?"

"No, sir," gulped Thubbs.

"I thought not," the man commented. "But I don't blame you for the little deception. It was a desire, I suppose, to conceal the fact that you are totally without resources?"

"That was it, sir."

"Now then," the interrogator resumed, "supposing we should show you a way to get money—plenty of it—how would you like that?"

"I would like that."

"Supposing there was involved in our plans, say, a little deception? Supposing the methods were not exactly, er—lawful—how would that impress you?"

Mr. Thubbs hesitated. In all his distress he had not yet turned to crime. One reason for that may have been that he didn't know how to turn to crime, except in a crude and exceedingly dangerous way.

"Well," he said with a slight falter, "that would depend——"

"It would depend," his questioner supplied, "on the nature of the transaction, I suppose? Exactly! Well, it doesn't involve murder or injury to any one. It is, to be perfectly frank, nothing more than a plan to get something for which the owner has no further use and which, if we don't get it, will revert to institutions which don't need it and have no more right to it than we."

"Why do you choose me, a stranger, to take into your plans?" Thubbs asked sud-

denly. The man was not surprised at the question. He knew, despite his braggadocio and shabbiness, that J. Corkle Thubbs was a man of intelligence. He needed an intelligent man, an educated man, and he was pleased at this latest evidence of those attributes.

"Well," said the solemn-faced stranger, "that's easily explained. We had to have a third party and there is not a man in the city whom we know who can fill the bill. It was necessary, therefore, for us to pick a stranger. It is not so easy to find the right man and we have been looking several weeks. We have observed many men but you are the first we have spoken to on the subject. We have been observing you for two days. The first thing that impressed us is that you are about thirty years of age—our man must be that age. The next is your size and build and, in general, your features.

"We reasoned that the man most likely to fall into our plans would be a man who was broke. We could find plenty of that sort of men on the Bowery and elsewhere, but—but they are a little too far gone to suit us.

"My friend here"—waving an arm toward his companion—"suggested that we search the Broadway district for a man who was down and out. That sort of a man, while down and out, would not be so far down as to have lost himself altogether. He probably would be reasonably sober. Undoubtedly he would be a man of intelligence—else he would not cling to the cleaner districts of the city. I am glad to add—and I mean no flattery—that you, from appearances, exceed our expectations. You—you are, of course, in need of clothing and other things, but in half a day you can be fixed up so that you will look like what you are—a gentleman. You talk and act like a gentleman of intelligence and breeding. Those, my friend, are the reasons you are here."

J. Corkle Thubbs had expanded like the bosom of a stock company's leading man on a village street. His new friends were not slow in pressing their advantage.

"How would you like," asked the interrogator, "to find yourself heir to half a million dollars?"

"I would like that, sir," was the weak answer.

"How would you like to wed a beautiful young woman and become master of a great mansion?"

"I would like that, sir." The voice was now no more than a whisper; hoarse with suppressed excitement.

"How would you like to settle down to a life of ease and riches, with money beyond all possible needs and nothing to do?"

J. Corkle Thubbs was beyond all utterance now; he could do nothing but nod, like a speechless invalid, pop-eyed and pale with entrancement.

"The time for all secrecy is past then," announced the large man, tugging at his ragged mustache as he turned from a whispered conference with his confederate. "My name, Mr. Thubbs, is Finlock, Cameron Finlock—and my friend is Mr. Ballantine Belcher."

J. Corkle Thubbs, still in a haze, arose mechanically and responded to the introductions by giving each a hand as limber as a linen collar at a rainy picnic. Then they sat down and put their heads close together. Being very keen students of humanity, Cameron Finlock and Ballantine Belcher knew that J. Corkle Thubbs, in motive, was as safe as Kidd's treasure.

The gray tide of dawn had surged over the city like a torrent, filling every crack and crevice, before the conference broke up in the flat-faced house in the upper Fifties. J. Corkle Thubbs directed his dazed feet down the cracked stone steps—alone; bound, in pursuance of agreement, for a cheap but respectable hotel in Seventh Avenue. He was very weary from scanty food and irregular sleep in hard places—undernourishment and undersleep that for months had been dragging him down. It had been deemed wise for him to sleep away the day—and the night, too, if he could.

Then, according to the carefully laid plan, he was next day to take on the outer aspects of a gentleman. He was not to dress expensively—the rôle he would play did not call for that. He was to dress neatly, from the epidermis out, in new and cheap garments—he must be barbered and bathed. Then, so said the scenario mapped out in the flat-faced house, he was to appear upon the screen of events in a certain suburb and take the first step toward the life of bliss which Fate had drawn for him from her celebrated bag of tricks.

J. Corkle Thubbs looked much better than most men after two years of dissipation and

hardship. There was in his eyes a certain brightness, like two stars hemmed in by clouds, which disarmed those who were seeking the marks of a drunkard. He was dirty —not with accumulated dirt, for he took as much care of himself as he could, but soiled as man will become who meets the barber but infrequently. His whiskers were scraggly, too, but those things do not necessarily spell booze. Whiskers, as a rule, thrive upon all male faces, and we have even seen them upon the faces of some members of the W. C. T. U. J. Corkle Thubbs was shabby but, being young, his dissipation had not left indelible marks. He was an ideal type of the man brought down by misfortune rather than folly.

This much had been impressed upon Cameron Finlock and Ballantine Belcher—and in that they were deceived. Had they not been deceived, they wouldn't have trusted J. Corkle Thubbs with the staggering sum of twenty-five dollars. Any amount which a man spends in getting drunk is, of course, a staggering—but we mustn't wander.

J. Corkle Thubbs came, alone, to the street with twenty-five dollars and confused notions as to whether he was asleep or awake. He counted and counted the five-dollar bills and assured himself that he was awake. He found that the saloons were just opening their front doors. It was as though a message had been flashed over the city that J. Corkle Thubbs was at large with twenty-five dollars.

Now, the body and nervous system of J. Corkle Thubbs were very weak. He was worn to a point where resistance to alcohol was feeble and sputtering. In the first saloon to which he came he took a drink —and found it nice. He called upon many bartenders who, the day before, had given him the icy stare, and displayed his wealth and dwelt glowingly upon the turn in his fortunes. He had a new story for every bartender—the tales never varied in brilliance but sometimes they did in detail. Not once, however, did he give the slightest hint of the *real* story. He was wise enough for that. The bartenders listened politely, served him drinks, and relentlessly pecked at the twenty-five dollars, like birds around a ragged grain sack.

The day wore on and J. Corkle Thubbs lost reason but not instinct. It is the way of heavy drinkers that before they collapse altogether they pass through a period in which they move about apparently in control of themselves but still not knowing what they do. Thubbs was in this stage, mind overwhelmed and nervous system rapidly going to shreds.

In a saloon on Sixth Avenue the bartender served him two drinks of vile whisky while an obliging patron took what money he had left. Then they kicked him into the street.

Night was just coming on—an Indian-summer evening from which the cold of the night before had fled; a night as soft as a raven's wing. Reason gone, J. Corkle Thubbs moved by instinct to the park of his choice, and, in a state of collapse, came to the bench in the copse of shrubbery just in time to save himself from falling in the pathway.

He awakened, more dead than alive, in the late hours of night; when the park was as quiet as the footfall of a cat on velvet. He lay staring up at the stars, his mind in a whirl—strange fancies besieging his quivering brain as the liquor faded within him. He felt the soreness of his abused body against the arms of the bench. He sat up, feebly, and his long, lean face dropped open like a ferry slip into a frightful yawn. He felt throbby in the head and crampy in the abdomen—his whole system poisoned by alcohol. He pressed one hand to his forehead while with the other he rubbed in the vicinity of his second vest button.

"Sick?" said a voice almost in his ear.

Thubbs turned his startled gaze and saw a man sitting in the seat at the other end of the bench.

"Sick is a very mild word," said J. Corkle Thubbs. He scrutinized the stranger as closely as he could without offense—and found he bore no resemblance to Cameron Finlock or Ballantine Belcher.

"You'll get over it all right," the stranger said. "I had one on the other day myself. You'll get over it all right."

"I doubt it very much," said Thubbs, and they lapsed into silence.

Thubb's observations for the next few minutes assured him that his companion also was down and out. His shabbiness and frowsiness were visible even in the darkened copse. Thoughts of the man, however, were dismissed in his frantic efforts to assemble events of the past day and night.

Thubbs was not yet sober, by any means, but he was sober enough to be terribly sick and to be seized by strange fancies. Events were, at first, as elusive as a floating ground in the breakfast coffee. The world seemed to stand on end, topsy-turvy —like a sign painter's "N."

"The way we fellows eat," Thubbs spoke after a few minutes of silence, "is enough to kill a man, isn't it?"

"You mean the way we *don't* eat," corrected the other.

"Well, partly that, and the things we are forced to eat. Not having regular meals, we eat whenever we can and whatever we can. Now I didn't drink so much to-night, but the things I ate this afternoon and this evening are about to kill me."

"And I'm dying from the things I didn't eat," said the man at the other end of the bench.

"I suppose," J. Corkle Thubbs raced on, striving to forget his sickness and terrible nervousness by conversation. "I suppose you're right—I've been that way lots of times myself, but things were different to-day. It was my feast day, I guess. I had——"

"Don't tell me about it unless you've got some of it left," his companion interjected gruffly.

"I'm not trying to arouse your hunger," Thubbs explained, "but this is extremely interesting. I was desperately hungry this afternoon and I saw a little girl coming out of a bakery with a sack in her hand. I snatched the sack and ran off up an alley. I got away and found that the bag contained six cream puffs and two charlotte russes. I ate them. Then a butcher called me into his shop and asked me to count chickens which were being unloaded in crates in the alley. I worked fifteen minutes and he gave me a foot and a half of liver sausage. I ate that. In his lunch box he found a piece of lemon pie and a pickled onion. I ate them. It certainly is a feast or a famine, for I went right down to Mahaffey's place and George, the colored lunch boy, gave me a plate of sauerkraut and a slab of cheese cake. I stepped out in front and the dago that has a fruit stand there gave me six roasted chestnuts and three plums. I had eaten everything up to date and was ready to drop when a live one with a jag on came along, dragged me inside, and bought me sixteen beers. Just as I was making my get-away, the bartender slipped me half a bottle of buttermilk which he was afraid would spoil. I was afraid I wouldn't get any more to eat for a week, so I drank it.

"I came over to this park and laid down —and no wonder I'm sick! And then, do you know I dreamed a fellow came here and took me to his apartment and fed me on bread, cold meat, and beer—and then sent me away with twenty-five dollars? That was certainly some dream!"

The other man was nodding dozily but J. Corkle Thubbs sprang into a description of his dream. He described Cameron Finlock and Ballantine Belcher and his experiences with them in detail, the while rubbing his hand over his crampy abdomen.

He told how these men of his dreams had hired him to pose as Edwin Hooper, a young man who had run away from his uncle's home when a lad and for the finding of whom the uncle now offered a reward of fifty thousand dollars. He told how Cameron Finlock and Ballantine Belcher, two "big-time" confidence men, had gotten into the good graces of the bachelor uncle, now near death, and had convinced him they could find Edwin Hooper. He told how the old man, since the boy ran away, had become vastly rich and how he wanted the nephew, his only blood relative, to take over the estate worth half a million, and wed, if mutually desirable, a young and beautiful ward of his—and live happily ever after. He told of how the girl refused to accept the estate until the nephew was found or proven to be dead.

"The most vivid dream in details I ever had," finished Thubbs.

"What did you say this uncle's name was?" the other asked.

"Mortimer Peebles," said Thubbs.

"And you say he's as rich as all that now?"

"My dream said he made a fortune after he moved here from Pennsylvania."

"Pennsylvania!" cried the other, and then checked his excitement, as though his expectations had been verified. "What day is this, Jack?" the stranger went on in a quieter voice.

"Wednesday night," said J. Corkle Thubbs, studying a moment. "Yes, it's Wednesday night—because it was Wednesday afternoon when I ate that symphony of assorted nightmares."

"You haven't been dreaming," said the stranger, rising. Thubbs saw that he was about his height and not unlike him in general appearance. "No, I don't think it's a dream." J. Corkle Thubbs looked again at the man and then concluded he was in worse shape than himself, for the other was trembling nervously. "You're sure about that Peebles address, are you?" the stranger went on. "Thanks. This happens to be Thursday night, Jack, and you've lost a day somewhere. Well, I'll be going along now, I guess. As a dreamer, you can't be beaten. I'd keep on rubbing those cramps if I were you. That solar plexus of yours has got Aladdin's lamp looking like a lightning bug eighty miles away!"

And Edwin Hooper left the park so fast that, had he had tires on his feet, he would have been arrested for speeding.

Twelve hours later two watches were reposing in perspiring hands in a large flat-faced house in the upper Fifties. One hand was that of a large man, slow of speech and movement, and the other belonged to a tall, slender man with an air of business.

"He's an hour overdue," said the tall man. "Do you suppose he got drunk and is going to fall down on us?"

"He's an hour overdue," agreed the other man, "and I think he got drunk and——"

There was a knock at the door. Two watches were clapped back into vest pockets and two men reached the door simultaneously. Opened, the door revealed two men, who at once stepped into the room. One was clad in new clothing, neatly pressed and perfect in condition. The other man was dressed without any effort for style, but there was a certain robust air about him which suggested authority. What was more interesting, however, was a small star which the latter revealed pinned to the lining of his coat.

"So long as this thing didn't go through," said the man, somewhat gruffly, "all the department asks of you fellows is to get out of town. We can't find anything on you at present, but you hadn't better stick around here. In the meantime, however, I'd like to have you meet Edwin Hooper."

His companion bowed with an easy grace, while the two men who occupied the suite stared from one to the other, but only for a moment.

"We'll get out of town," the large, slow-spoken man said, and the visitors withdrew.

"That bum squealed on us!" said the slender man viciously, when they were alone, with trunk lids thrown open.

"Yes," said the other, "but where did they dig up Edwin Hooper?"

And then, being good sports, they both smiled.

Hinds has more coming. He writes regularly for the POPULAR.

LUXURY IN THE FIELD

I'VE read a lot about our boys' heroic fighting and endurance," observed "Hi" Newman, whose knowledge of history and memory of dates stir the admiration and envy of every college professor he meets. "Hi" is a dignified Kentucky gentleman past the fifty-year mark, with whiskers as long as his memory.

"And," he continued, "they went up against stuff like that which a Kentucky colonel in the Federal army put to his men in the days of sixty-three. The colonel was a stickler for discipline and bodily fitness. He was always afraid his men would get too 'soft.' If they were slow in leaping into a river full of cakes of ice as big as a horse, he would begin to roar about having to command 'a lot of women and children.'

"One night in the dead of winter, after a march that would have taken the heart out of an elephant, he was snooping around, seeing whether things were in proper shape. They were not! One of the men had rolled a big snowball and, lying on his back, was snoring loudly, resting his head on the snowball as a pillow.

"That was more than the colonel could stand. He strode up to the recumbent form and kicked the snowball pillow into fragments.

"'Here!' he shouted, swearing grandly. 'You know my rule—no effeminacy!'"

The Green Rust

By Edgar Wallace

Author of "Companions of the Ace High," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

As John Millinborn lay on his deathbed he told his friend, James Kitson, solicitor, of the unfortunate marriage of his daughter, who died leaving a child, Olivia Predeaux, whose father was an international swindler. Millinborn wants to leave the great fortune he has made in shipbuilding to the girl, who, after her mother's death, is thought to have been working in London, beginning at the age of fifteen years. A Doctor van Heerden, who had met him on a train en route to his country place, attends the shipbuilder, after whose death a knife is found sticking in his side. A tramp had been seen near the window. In ordinary lodgings lives a girl known as Olivia Cresswell, and Doctor van Heerden is a fellow lodger. A Mr. Beale, with a reputation as a drunkard, lives there also, and one day reveals himself to the girl as a detective. He finds in the doctor's rooms a package of what he call "Green Rust," saying that it is a mysterious and terrible substance. Miss Cresswell, employed at Punsonby's, a fashionable store, is suddenly discharged, and is hired at a higher salary by Van Heerden. She becomes suspicious of him while handling his correspondence. This follows a false charge of dishonesty laid against the girl by Punsonby's, when Beale takes "planted" evidence from her room before it can be "discovered." Beale also prevents her from using a sample gift of soap which would have given her a skin disease and placed her in the power of Van Heerden. She accompanies the doctor afterward to a fashionable restaurant called the Grand Alliance. There they meet a tipsy man who goes by the name of Jackson, and whom Van Heerden plans to send to Canada. When she tells him her name is Olivia Cresswell he collapses, saying that she is his daughter, and that his name is Predeaux, though he married under the name of Cresswell. Van Heerden gives him a drug in a glass of water, and he dies, when Beale appears and says to the doctor that "the cost of the Green Rust is totaling up." There is no evidence against Van Heerden, however. The doctor soon afterward abducts Olivia, coolly telling her that he intends to marry her. Beale gets on his trail, and himself obtains a blank marriage license for use in an emergency.

(*A Four-Part Story—Part Three*)

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PAWN TICKET.

OLIVIA CRESSWELL awoke to consciousness as she was being carried up the stairs of the house. She may have recovered sooner, for she retained a confused impression of being laid down amidst tall waving grasses and of hearing somebody grunt that she was heavier than he thought.

Also she remembered, as dimly, the presence of Doctor van Heerden standing over her, and he was wearing a long gray dust coat.

As her captor kicked open the door of her room she scrambled out of his arms and leaned against the bed rail for support.

"I'm all right," she said breathlessly. "It was foolish to faint, but—but you frightened me."

The man grinned and seemed about to speak but a sharp voice from the landing called him and he went out, slamming the door behind him. She crossed to the bathroom, bathed her face in cold water, and felt better, though she was still a little giddy.

Then she sat down to review the situation and in that review two figures came alternately into prominence, Van Heerden and Beale.

She was an eminently sane girl. She had had the beginnings of what might have been an unusually fine education, had it not been interrupted by the death of her foster mother. She had, too, the advantage which the finished young lady does not possess, of having grafted to the wisdom of the schools the sure understanding of men and things which personal contact with struggling humanity can alone give to us. She had graduated in business offices where all women were fair game to all men, where

a girl becomes an expert fencer against her old enemy, man, where the rewards of virtue are few and of a departure from virtue, none.

The great problems of life had been sprung upon her with all their hideous realism and through all she had retained her poise and her clear vision. Many of the phenomena represented by man's attitude to woman she could understand, but that a man who admittedly did not love her and had no other apparent desire than to rid himself of the incubus of a wife as soon as he was wed should wish to marry her was incomprehensible. That he had already published the banns of her marriage left her gasping at his audacity. Strange how her thoughts leaped all the events of the morning, the wild rush to escape, the struggle with the hideously masked man, and all that went before or followed, and went back to the night before.

Somehow, she knew that Van Heerden had told her the truth and that there was behind this act of his a deeper significance than she could grasp. She remembered what he had said about Beale and flushed.

"You're silly, Matilda," she said to herself, employing the term of address which she reserved for moments of self-deprecation. "Here is a young man you have only met half a dozen times, who is probably a very nice married policeman with a growing family and you are going hot and cold at the suggestion that you're in love with him." She shook her head reproachfully.

And yet upon Beale all her thoughts were centered and however they might wander it was to Beale they returned. She could analyze that buoyancy which had asserted itself, that confidence which had suddenly become a mental armor, which repelled every terrifying thought, to this faith she had in a man, who a few weeks before she had looked upon as an incorrigible drunkard.

She had time for thought and really, though this she did not acknowledge, she desperately needed the occupation of that thought. What was Beale's business? Why did he employ her to copy out this list of American and Canadian statistics? Why did he want to know all these hotels, their proprietors, the chief of the police, and the like? She wished she had her papers and books so that she might go on extracting that interminable list.

What would Van Heerden do now? Would her attempted escape change his plans? How would he overcome the difficulty of marrying a girl who was certain to denounce him in the presence of so independent a witness as a clergyman? She would die before she married him, she told herself.

She could not rest, and walked about the room examining the framed prints and looking at the books, and occasionally walking to the glass above the dresser to see if any sign was left of the red mark on her cheek where Van Heerden's hand had fallen. This exercise gave her a curious satisfaction, and when she saw that the mark had subsided and was blending more to the color of her skin she felt disappointed. Startled, she analyzed this curious mental attitude and again came to Beale. She wanted Beale to see the place. She wanted Beale's sympathy. She wanted Beale's rage—she was sure he would rage.

She laughed to herself, and for want of other and better amusement walked to the drawers in the dresser and examined their contents. They were empty and unlocked save one, which refused to respond to her tug. She remembered she had a small bunch of keys in her bag.

"I am going to be impertinent. Forgive the liberty," she said as she felt the lock give to the first attempt.

She pulled the drawer open. It contained a few articles of feminine attire and a thick black-leather portfolio. She lifted this out, laid it on the table and opened it. It was filled with foolscap. Written on the cover was the word "Argentine," and somehow the writing was familiar to her. It was a bold hand, obviously feminine.

"Where have I seen that before?" she asked, and knit her forehead.

She turned the first leaf and read:

"Alsigar Hotel, Fournos, Proprietor, Miguel Porcorini. Index 2."

Her mouth opened in astonishment and she ran down the list. She took out another folder. It was marked "Canada" and she turned the leaves rapidly. She recognized this work. It was the same work that Beale had given to her, a list of the hotels, their proprietors and means of conveyance, but there was no reference to the police. And then it dawned upon her. An unusually long description produced certain

characteristics of writing which she recognized.

"Hilda Glaum!" she said. "I wonder what this means?"

She examined the contents of the drawer again and some of them puzzled her. Not the little stack of handkerchiefs, the folded collars and the like. If Hilda Glaum was in the habit of visiting Deans Folly and used this room it was natural that these things should be here. If this were her bureau the little carton of nibs and the spare notebook were to be expected. It was the steel box which set her wondering. This she discovered in the far corner of the drawer. If she could have imagined anything so fantastic she might have believed that the box had been specially made to hold the thing it contained and preserve it from the dangers of fire. The lid, which closed with a spring catch released by the pressure of a tiny button, was perfectly fitted, so that the box was in all probability airtight.

She opened it without difficulty. The sides were lined with what seemed to be at first sight thick cardboard but which proved on closer inspection to be asbestos. She opened it with a sense of eager anticipation, but her face fell. Save for a tiny square blue envelope at the bottom, the box was empty!

She lifted it in her hand to shake out the envelope and it was then that the idea occurred to her that the box had been made for the envelope, which refused to budge until she lifted one end with a hairpin.

It was unsealed and she slipped in her finger and pulled out a pawn ticket!

She had an inclination to laugh, which she checked. She examined the ticket seriously. It announced the fact that Messrs. Rosenblaum Bros., of Commercial Road, London, had advanced ten shillings on a "Gents. Silver Hunter Watch" and the pledge had been made in the name of Van Heerden!

She gazed at it bewildered. He was not a man who needed ten shillings or ten dollars or ten pounds. Why should he pledge a watch and why, having pledged it, should he keep the ticket with such care?

Olivia hesitated a moment, then slipped the ticket from its cover, put back the envelope at the bottom of the box and closed the lid. She found a hiding place for the little square pasteboard before she returned box and portfolio to the drawer and locked it.

There was a tap at the door and hastily she replaced the key in her bag.

"Come in," she said.

She recognized the man who stood in the doorway as he who had carried her back to the room.

There was a strangeness in his bearing which made her uneasy, a certain subdued hilarity which suggested drunkenness.

"Don't make a noise," he whispered with a stifled chuckle. "If Gregory hears, he'll raise hell—excuse the language."

She saw that the key was in the lock on the outside of the door and this she watched. But he made no attempt to withdraw it and closed the door behind him softly.

"My name is Bridgers," he whispered. "Van Heerden has told you about me—Horace Bridgers. Do you——" He took a little tortoise-shell box from the pocket of his frayed waistcoat and opened it with a little kick of his middle finger. It was half full of white powder that glittered in a stray ray of sunlight. "Try a snip," he begged eagerly, "and all your troubles will go—phutt!"

"Thank you, no," she shook her head, looking at him with a perplexed smile. "I don't know what it is."

"It's the white terror," he chuckled again, "better than the green—not so horribly musty as the green, eh?"

"I'm not in the mood for terrors of any kind," she said with a half smile. She wondered why he had come and had a momentary hope that he was ignorant of Van Heerden's character.

"All right." He stuffed the box back into his waistcoat pocket. "*You're* the loser; you'll never find heaven on earth!"

She waited. All the time he was speaking, it seemed to her that he was on the qui vive for some interruption from below. He would stop in his speech to turn a listening ear to the door. Moreover, she was relieved to see he made no attempt to advance any farther into the room. That he was under the influence of some drug, she guessed. His eyes glittered with unnatural brilliance, his hands, discolored and uncleanly, moved nervously and were never still.

"I'm Bridgers," he said again. "I'm Van Heerden's best man—rather a comedown

for the best analytical chemist that The School ever turned out, eh? Doing odd jobs for a dirty Deutscher!" He walked to the door, opened it, and listened, then tiptoed across the room to her.

"You know," he whispered, "you're Van Heerden's girl—what is the game?"

"What is——" she stammered.

"What is the game? What is it all about? I've tried to pump Gregory and Milsom, but they're mysterious. Curse all mysteries, my dear. What is the game? Why are they sending men to America, Canada, Australia, and India? Come along and be a pal! Tell me! I've seen the office, I know all about it. Thousands of sealed envelopes filled with steamship tickets and money. Thousands of telegraph forms already addressed. You don't fool me!" He hissed the last words almost in her face. "Why is he employing the crooks and the throwouts of science? Perrilli, Maxon, Boyd Heyler, Sabatini—and me? If the game's square, why doesn't he take the new men from the schools?"

She shook her head, being, by now, less interested in such revelations as he might make than in her own personal comfort. For his attitude was grown menacing. Then the great idea came to her. Evidently this man knew nothing of the circumstances under which she had come to the house. To him, she was a willful but willing assistant of the doctor, who, for some reason or other, it had been necessary to place under restraint.

"I will tell you everything if you will take me back to my home," she said. "I cannot give you proofs here."

She saw suspicion gather in his eyes. Then he laughed.

"That won't wash," he sneered. "You know it all. I can't leave here," he said. "Besides, you told me the last time that there was nothing. I used to watch you working away at night," he went on to the girl's amazement. "I've sat looking at you for hours, writing and writing and writing."

She understood now. She and Hilda Glaum were of about the same build, and she was mistaken for Hilda by this bemused man who had, in all probability, never seen the other girl face to face.

"What made you run away?" he asked suddenly, but with a sudden resolve she brought him back to the subject he had started to discuss.

"What is the use of my telling you?" she asked. "You know as much as I."

"Only bits," he replied eagerly, "but I don't know Van Heerden's game. I know why he's marrying this other girl. Everybody knows that. When is the wedding?"

"What other girl?" she asked.

"Cresswell or Predeaux, whatever she calls herself," said Bridgers carelessly. "She was a store girl, wasn't she?"

"But," she tried to speak calmly, "why do you think he wants to marry her?"

He laughed softly.

"Don't be silly," he said. "You can't fool me. Everybody knows she's worth a million."

"Worth a million?" she gasped.

"Worth a million." He smacked his lips and fumbled for the little box in his waistcoat pocket. "Try a snip—you'll know what it feels like to be old man Millinborn's heiress."

There was a sound in the hall below and he turned with an exaggerated start. She thought it theatrical, but could not know of the jangled nerves of the drug-soddened man which magnified all sound to an intensity which was almost painful.

He opened the door and slid out—and did not close the door behind him.

Swiftly she followed, and as she reached the landing saw his head disappear down the stairs. She was in a blind panic; a thousand formless terrors gripped her and turned her resolute soul to water. She could have screamed her relief when she saw that the sliding door was half open—the man had not stopped to close it, and she passed through and down the first flight. He had vanished before she reached the halfway landing and the hall below was empty. It was a wide hall, stone flagged, with a glass door between her and the open portal.

She flew down the stairs, pulled open the door, and ran straight into Van Heerden's arms.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE JEW OF CRACOW.

If there were committed in London the crime of the century—a crime so tremendous that the names of the chief actors in this grisly drama were on the lips of every man, woman and talkative child in Europe, you might walk into a certain department of Scotland Yard with the assurance that you would not meet within the confining

walls of that bureau any police officer who was interested in the slightest, or who, indeed, had even heard of the occurrence save by accident. This department is known as the Parley Voos or P. V. department and concerns itself only in suspicious events beyond the territorial waters of Great Britain and Ireland. Its body is on the Thames Embankment, but its soul is at the Central Office, or at the Surêté, or even at the Yamen of the police minister of Peking.

It is sublimely ignorant of the masters of crime who dwell beneath the shadows of the Yard, but it could tell you without stopping to look up references not only the names of the known gunmen of New York but the composition of almost every secret society in China.

A Pole had a quarrel with a Jew in the streets of Cracow, and they quarreled over the only matter which is worthy of quarrel in that part of Poland. The sum in dispute was the comparatively paltry one of two hundred and sixty kronen, but when the Jew was taken in a dying condition to the hospital he made a statement which was so curious that the chief of police in Cracow sent it on to Vienna and Vienna sent it to Berne and Berne scratched its chin thoughtfully and sent it forward to Paris, where it was distributed to Rio de Janeiro, New York, and London.

The assistant chief of the P. V. department came out of his room and drifted aimlessly into the uncomfortable bureau of Mr. McNorton.

"There's a curious yarn through from Cracow," he said, "which might interest your friend Beale."

"What is it?" asked McNorton, who invariably found the stories of the P. V. department fascinating but profitless.

"A man was murdered," said the P. V. man lightly, as though that were the least important feature of the story, "but before he pegged out he made a will or an assignment of his property to his son, in the course of which he said that none of his stocks—he was a corn factor—were to be sold under one thousand kronen a bushel. That's about thirty pounds."

"Corn at thirty pounds a bushel?" said McNorton. "Was he delirious?"

"Not at all," said the other. "He was a very well-known man in Cracow, one Zibowski, who during the late war was principal buying agent for the German government. The chief of the police at Cracow apparently asked him if he wasn't suffering from illusions and the man then made a statement that the German government had an option on all the grain in Galicia, Hungary, and the Ukraine at a lower price. Zibowski held out for better terms. It is believed that he was working with a member of the German government who made a fortune in the war out of army contracts. In fact, he as good as let this out just before he died when he spoke in his delirium of a wonderful invention which was being worked on behalf of the German government, an invention called the Green Rust."

McNorton whistled. "Is that all?" he said.

"That's all," said the P. V. man. "I seem to remember that Beale has made one or two mysterious references to the Rust. Where is he now?"

"He left town last night," replied McNorton.

"Can you get in touch with him?"

The other shook his head.

"I suppose you are sending on a copy of this communication to the cabinet," he said. "It may be rather serious. Whatever the scheme is, it is being worked in London and Van Heerden is the chief operator."

He took down his hat and went out in search of Kitson, whom he found in the lobby of the hotel. James Kitson came toward him eagerly.

"Have you news of Beale?"

"He was at Kingston this morning," said McNorton, "with Parson Homo, but he has left. I was on the phone to the inspector at Kingston, who did not know very much and could give me no very definite news as to whether Beale had made his discovery. He interviewed the tramp early this morning but apparently extracted very little that was helpful. As a matter of fact, I came to you to ask if he had got in touch with you."

Kitson shook his head.

"I want to see him about his Green Rust scare—Beale has gone single-handed into this matter," said the superintendent, shaking his head, "and he has played the lone game a little too long."

"Is it very serious?"

"It may be an international matter," replied McNorton gravely. "All that we know at present is this: A big plot is on foot to tamper with the food supplies of the world and the chief plotter is Van Heerden.

Beale knows more about the matter than any of us, but he only gives us occasional glimpses of the real situation. I have been digging out Van Heerden's record without, however, finding anything very incriminating. Up to a point he seems to have been a model citizen, though his associates were not always of the best. He has been seen in the company of at least three people with a bad history. Milsom, a doctor convicted of murder in the nineties, Bridgers, an American chemist, with two convictions for illicit trading in drugs, Gregory—who seems to be his factotum and general assistant—convicted in Manchester for saccharine smuggling, and a girl called Glaum who is an alien, charged during the war for failing to register."

"But against Van Heerden?"

"Nothing. He has traveled a great deal in America and on the continent. He was in Spain a few years ago and was suspected of being associated with the German embassy. His association with the Millinborn murder you know."

"Yes, I know that," said James Kitson bitterly.

"Beale will have to tell us all he knows," McNorton went on, "and probably we can tell him something he doesn't know—namely, that Van Heerden conducts a pretty extensive correspondence by cable with all parts of the world. Something has happened in Cracow which gives a value to all Beale's suspicions."

Briefly, he related the gist of the story which had reached him that morning.

"It is incredible," said Kitson when the chief had finished. "It would be humanly impossible for the world to buy at that price. And there is no reason for it. It happens that I am interested in a milling corporation, and I know that the world's crops are good; in fact, the harvest will be well above the average. I should say that the Cracow Jew was talking in delirium."

But McNorton shook his head. "I hope you're right," he said. "I hope the whole thing is a mare's-nest, and for once in my life I trust that the police clews are as wrong as hell. But, anyway, Van Heerden is cabling mighty freely—and I want Beale!"

But Beale was unreachable. A visit to his apartment produced no results. The "foreign gentleman" who, on the previous day, had called on Van Heerden had been seen there that morning, but he, too, had vanished and none of McNorton's watchers had been able to pick him up.

McNorton shifted the direction of his search and dropped into the palatial establishment of Punsonby's. He strolled past the grille-hidden desk which had once held Olivia Cresswell and saw out of the tail of his eye a stranger in her place and by her side the darkly taciturn Hilda Glaum.

Mr. White, that pompous man, greeted him strangely. As the police chief came into the private office Mr. White half rose, turned deadly pale, and became of a sudden bereft of speech. McNorton recognized the symptoms from long acquaintance with the characteristics of detected criminals and wondered how deeply this pompous man was committed to whatever scheme was hatching.

"Ah—ah—Mr. McNorton!" stammered White, shaking like a leaf. "Won't you sit down, please? To what—to what?" he swallowed twice before he could get the words out, "to what am I indebted——"

"Just called in to look you up," said McNorton genially. "Have you been losing any more—registered letters lately?"

Mr. White subsided again into his chair.

"Yes, yes—no, I mean," he said, "no—ah, inspector——"

"Superintendent," corrected the other good-humoredly.

"A thousand pardons, superintendent," said Mr. White hastily. "No, sir, nothing so unfortunate."

He shot a look half fearful, half resentful at the police officer.

"And how is your friend, Doctor van Heerden?"

Mr. White twisted uncomfortably in his chair. Again his look of nervousness and apprehension.

"Mr.—ah—van Heerden is not a friend of mine," he said, "a business acquaintance," he sighed heavily, "just a business acquaintance."

McNorton nodded. The White he had known was not the White of to-day. The man looked older, his face was more heavily lined and his eyes were dark with weariness."

"I suppose he's a pretty shrewd fellow," he remarked carelessly. "You are interested in some of his concerns, aren't you?"

"Only one, only one," replied White sharply, "and I wish to heaven——"

He stopped himself.

"And you wish you weren't, eh?"

Again the older man wriggled in his chair. "Doctor van Heerden is very clever," he said, "he has great schemes, in one of which I am—ah—financially interested. That is all—I have put money into his—ah—syndicate, without, of course, knowing the nature of the work which is being carried out. That I would impress upon you."

"You are a trusting investor," said the good-humored McNorton.

"I am a child in matters of finance," admitted Mr. White, but added quickly, "except, of course, in so far as the finance of Punsonby's, which is one of the soundest business concerns in London, Mr. McNorton. We pay our dividends regularly and our balance sheets are a model for the industrial world."

"So I have heard," said McNorton dryly. "I am interested in syndicates, too. By the way, what is Doctor van Heerden's scheme?"

Mr. White shrugged his shoulders. "I haven't the slightest idea," he confessed with a melancholy smile. "I suppose it is very foolish of me, but I have such faith in the doctor's genius that when he came to me and said: 'My dear White, I want you to invest a few thousand in one of my concerns,' I said: 'My dear doctor, here is my check; don't bother me about the details but send me my dividends regularly.' Ha, ha!"

His laugh was hollow and would not have deceived a child of ten.

"So you invested forty thousand pounds——" began McNorton.

"Forty thousand pounds!" gasped Mr. White. "How did you know?"

He went a trifle paler.

"These things get about," said McNorton. "As I was going to say, you invested forty thousand pounds without troubling to discover what sort of work the syndicate was undertaking. I am not speaking now as a police officer, Mr. White," he went on, and White did not disguise his relief, "but as an old acquaintance of yours."

"Say friend," said the fervent Mr. White, "I have always regarded you, Mr. McNorton, as a friend of mine. Let me see, how long have we known one another? I think the first time we met was when Punsonby's was burgled in ninety-three."

"It's a long time," said McNorton, "but don't let us get off the subject of your investment, which interests me as a friend. You gave Doctor van Heerden all this money without even troubling to discover whether his enterprise was a legal one. I am not suggesting it was illegal," he said as White opened his mouth to protest, "but it seems strange that you did not trouble to inquire."

"Oh, of course I inquired, naturally I inquired, Mr. McNorton," said White eagerly. "It was for some chemical process, and I know nothing about chemistry. I don't mind admitting to you," he lowered his voice though there was no necessity, "that I regret my investment very much. We business men have many calls. We cannot allow our money to be tied up for too long a time and it happens—ah—that just at this moment I should be very glad, very glad, indeed, to liquidate that investment."

McNorton nodded. He knew a great deal more about White's financial embarrassments than that gentleman gave him credit for. He knew, for example, that the immaculate managing director of Punsonby's was in the hands of money lenders and that those money lenders were squeezing him. He suspected that all was not well with Punsonby's. There had been curious rumors in the city among the bill discounters that Punsonby's "paper" left much to be desired.

"Do you know the nationality of Van Heerden?" he asked.

"Dutch," replied Mr. White promptly.

"Are you sure of this?"

"I would stake my life on it," answered the heroic Mr. White.

"As I came through to your office I saw a young lady at the cashier's desk—a Miss Glaum I think her name is. Is she Dutch, too?"

"Miss Glaum—ah—well, Miss Glaum," White hesitated, "a very nice, industrious girl and a friend of Doctor van Heerden's. As a matter of fact, I engaged her at his recommendation. You see, I was under an obligation to the doctor. He had—ah—attended me in my illness."

That this was untrue McNorton knew. White was one of those financial shuttlecocks which shrewd money lenders toss from one to the other. White had been introduced by Van Heerden to Capital in a moment of hectic despair and had responded when his financial horizon was clearer by

pledging his credit for the furtherance of Van Heerden's scheme.

"Of course you know that as a shareholder in Van Heerden's syndicate you cannot escape responsibility for the purposes to which your money is put," he said as he rose to go. "I hope you get your money back."

"Do you think there is any doubt?" demanded White in consternation.

"There is always a doubt about getting money back from syndicates," said McNorton cryptically.

"Please don't go yet." Mr. White passed round the end of his desk and intercepted the detective with unexpected agility, taking, so to speak, the door out of his hands and closing it. "I am alarmed, Mr. McNorton," he said as he led the other back to his chair. "I won't disguise it. I am seriously alarmed by what you have said. It is not the thought of losing the money, oh, dear, no. Punsonby's would not be ruined by—ah—a paltry forty thousand pounds. It is, if I may be allowed to say so, the sinister suggestion in your speech, inspector—superintendent, I mean. Is it possible"—he stood squarely in front of McNorton, his hands on his hips, his eye glass dangling from his fastidious fingers and his head pulled back as though he wished to avoid contact even with the possibility—"is it possible that in my ignorance I have been assisting to finance a scheme which is—ah—illegal, immoral, improper, and contrary—ah—to the best interests of the common weal?"

He shook his head as though he were unable to believe his own words.

"Everything is possible in finance," said McNorton with a smile. "I am not saying that Doctor van Heerden's syndicate is an iniquitous one, I have not even seen a copy of his articles of association. Doubtless you could oblige me in that respect."

"I haven't got such a thing," denied Mr. White vigorously. "The syndicate was not registered. It was, so to speak, a private concern."

"But the exploitation of Green Rust?" suggested the superintendent, and the man's face lost the last vestige of color it possessed.

"The Green Rust?" he faltered. "I have heard the phrase. I know nothing——"

"You know nothing, but suspect the worst," said McNorton. "Now I am going to speak plainly to you. The reason you know nothing about this syndicate of Van Heerden's is because you had a suspicion that it was being formed for an illegal purpose—please don't interrupt me—you know nothing because you did not want to know. I doubt even whether you deceived yourself. You saw a chance of making big money, Mr. White, and big money has always had an attraction for you. There isn't a fool's scheme that was ever hatched in a back-alley bar that you haven't dropped money over. And you saw a chance here, more tangible than any that had been presented to you."

"I swear to you——" began White.

"The time has not come for you to swear anything," said McNorton sternly. "There is only one place where a man need take his oath and that is on the witness stand. I will tell you this frankly, that we are as much in the dark as you pretend to be. There is only one man who knows or guesses the secret of the Green Rust and that man is Beale."

"Beale!"

"You have met the gentleman, I believe? I hope you don't have to meet him again. The Green Rust may mean little. It may mean no more than that you will lose your money—and I should imagine that is the least which will happen to you. On the other hand, Mr. White, I do not disguise from you the fact that it may also mean your death at the hands of the law."

White made a gurgling noise in his throat and held on to the desk for support.

"I have only the haziest information as to what it is all about, but somehow," McNorton knit his brows in a frown and was speaking half to himself, "I seem to feel that it is a bad business—a damnably bad business."

He took up his hat from the table and walked to the door.

"I don't know whether to say au revoir or good-by," he said with twitching lips.

"Good-by—ah—is a very good old-fashioned word," said Mr. White in a heroic attempt to imitate the other's good humor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRIDGERS BREAKS LOOSE.

Doctor van Heerden sat by the side of the big four-poster bed, where the girl lay, and his cold blue eyes held a spark of amusement.

"You look very foolish," he said.

Olivia Cresswell turned her head sharply so as to remove the man from her line of vision.

More than this she could not do, for her hands and feet were strapped, and on the pillow near her head was a big bath towel saturated with water which had been employed in stifling her healthy screams which marked her return to understanding.

"You look very foolish," said the doctor, chewing at the end of his cigar, "and you look no more foolish than you have been. Bridgers let you out, eh? Nice man, Mr. Bridgers; what had he been telling you?"

She turned her head again and favored him with a stare. Then she looked at the angry red mark on her wrists where the straps chafed.

"How Hunlike!" she said, but this time he smiled.

"You will not make me lose my temper again, little-wife-to-be," he mocked her. "You may call me Hun or Heinie or Fritz, or any of the barbarous and vulgar names which the outside world employ to vilify my countrymen, but nothing you say will distress or annoy me. To-morrow you and I will be man and wife."

"This is not Germany," she said scornfully. "You cannot make a woman marry you against her will; this is——"

"The land of the free," he interrupted suavely. "Yes—I know those lands, on both sides of the Atlantic. But even there curious things happen. And you're going to marry me—you will say 'yes' to the sleek English clergyman when he asks you whether you will take this man to be your married husband, to love and cherish and all that sort of thing, you'll say 'yes.'"

"I shall say 'no,'" she said steadily.

"You will say 'yes'," he smiled. "I had hoped to be able to give sufficient time to you so that I might persuade you to act sensibly. I could have employed arguments which I think would have convinced you that there are worse things than marriage with me."

"I cannot think of any," she replied coldly.

"Then you are singularly dense," said the doctor. "I have already told you the conditions under which that marriage will take place. There might be no marriage, you know, and a different end to this adventure," he said significantly, and she shivered.

He said nothing more for five minutes, simply sitting biting at the cigar between his teeth and looking at her blankly as though his thoughts were far away and she was the least of the problems which confronted him.

"I know it is absurd to ask you," he said suddenly, "but I presume you have not devoted any of your studies to the question of capital punishment. I see you haven't, but there is one interesting fact about the execution of criminals which is not generally known to the public, and it is that, in many countries, my own for example, before a man is led to execution he is doped with a drug which I will call bromocine. Does that interest you?"

She made no reply and he laughed quietly.

"It should interest you very much," he said. "The effect of bromocine," he went on, speaking with the quiet precision to one who was lecturing on the subject to an interested audience, "is peculiar. It reduces the subject to a condition of extreme lassitude, so that really nothing matters or seems to matter. While perfectly conscious, the subject goes obediently to his death, behaves normally and does just what he is told—in fact, it destroys the will."

"Why do you tell me this?" she asked, a sudden fear gripping her heart.

He half turned in his chair, reached out his hand, and took a little black case from the table near the window. This he laid on the bed and opened and she watched him fascinated. He took a tiny bottle containing a colorless liquid and with great care laid it on the coverlet. Then he extracted a small hypodermic syringe and a needle-pointed nozzle. He uncorked the bottle, inserted the syringe, and filled it, then he screwed on the needle, pressed the plunger until a fine jet leaped up in the air, then he laid it carefully back in the case.

"You say you will not marry me and I presume that you would make a scene when I bring in the good English parson to perform the ceremony. I had hoped," he said apologetically, "to have given you a wedding with all the pomp and circumstance which women, as I understand, love. Failing that, I hoped for a quiet wedding in the little church out yonder," he jerked

his head toward the window, "but now I am afraid that I must ask his reverence to carry out the ceremony in this house."

He rose, leaned over her, and deftly pulled back her sleeve.

"If you scream I shall smother you with the towel," he said. "This won't hurt you very much. As I was going to say, you will be married here because you are in a delicate state of health and you will say 'yes'."

She winced as the needle punctured the skin.

"It won't hurt you for very long," he said calmly. "You will say 'yes,' I repeat, because I shall tell you to say 'yes'."

Suddenly the sharp pricking pain in her arm ceased. She was conscious of a sensation as though her arm were being blown up like a bicycle tire, but it was not unpleasant. He withdrew the needle and kept his finger pressed upon the little red wound where it had gone in.

"I shall do this to you again to-night," he said, "and you will not feel it at all and to-morrow morning you will not care very much what happens. I hope it will not be necessary to give you a dose to-morrow afternoon."

"I shall not always be under the influence of this drug," she said between her teeth, "and there will be a time of reckoning for you, Doctor van Heerden."

"By which time," he said calmly, "I shall have committed a crime so wonderful and so enormous that the mere offense of 'administering a noxious drug'—that is the terminology which describes the offense—will be of no importance and hardly worth the consideration of the crown officers. Now I think I can unfasten you." He loosened and removed the straps at her wrists and about her feet and put them in his pocket.

"You had better get up and walk about," he said, "or you will be stiff. I am really being very kind to you, if you only knew it. I am too big to be vindictive. And, by the way, I had an interesting talk with your friend, Mr. Beale, this afternoon, a persistent young man who has been having me shadowed all day." He laughed quietly. "If I hadn't to go back to the surgery for the bromocine I should have missed our very interesting conversation. That young man is very much in love with you." He looked amusedly at the growing red in her face. "He is very much in love with you," he repeated. "What a pity! What a thousand pities!"

"How soon will this drug begin to act?" she asked.

"Are you frightened?"

"No, but I should welcome anything which made me oblivious to your presence—you are not exactly a pleasant companion," she said with a return to the old tone he knew so well.

"Content yourself, little person," he said with simulated affection, "you will soon be rid of me."

"Why do you want to marry me?"

"I can tell you now," he said. "Because you are a very rich woman and I want your money, half of which comes to me on my marriage."

"Then the man spoke the truth!" She sat up suddenly, but the effort made her head swim.

He caught her by the shoulders and laid her gently down.

"What man—not that babbling idiot, Bridgers!" He said something but instantly recovered his self-possession. "Keep quiet," he said with professional sternness. "Yes, you are the heiress of an interesting gentleman named John Millinborn."

"John Millinborn!" she gasped. "The man who was murdered!"

"The man who was killed," he corrected. "'Murder' is a stupid, vulgar word. Yes, my dear, you are his heiress. He was your uncle and he left you something over six million dollars. That is to say he left *us* that colossal sum."

"But I don't understand. What does it mean?"

"Your name is Predeaux. Your father was the ruffian——"

"I know, I know," she cried, "the man in the hotel. The man who died. My father! Oh, my God!"

"Interesting, isn't it?" he said calmly. "Like something out of a book. Yes, my dear, that was your parent, a dissolute ruffian whom you will do well to forget. I heard John Millinborn tell his lawyer that your mother died of a broken heart, penniless, as a result of your father's cruelty and unscrupulousness, and I should imagine that was the truth."

"My father!" she murmured.

She lay, her face as white as the pillow, her eyes closed.

"John Millinborn left a fortune for you—and I think that you might as well know the truth now—the money was left in trust. You were not to know that you were an heiress until you were married. He was afraid of some fortune-hunter ruining your young life, as Predeaux ruined your mother's. That was thoughtful of him. Now I don't intend ruining your life; I intend leaving you with half your uncle's fortune and the capacity for enjoying all that life can hold for a high-spirited young woman."

"I'll not do it, I'll not do it, I'll not do it," she muttered.

He rose from the chair and bent over her.

"My young friend, you are going to sleep," he said to himself, waited a little longer, and left the room, closing the door behind him.

He descended to the hall and passed into the big dining hall beneath the girl's bedroom. The room had two occupants, a stout, hairless man who had neither hair, eyebrows, nor vestige of beard, and a younger man.

"Hello, Bridgers," said Van Heerden, addressing the latter. "You've been talking."

"Well, who doesn't?" snarled the man.

He pulled the tortoise-shell box from his pocket, opened the lid, and took a pinch from its contents, snuffling the powder luxuriously.

"That stuff will kill you one of these days," said Van Heerden.

"It will make him better-tempered," growled the hairless man. "I don't mind people who take cocaine as long as they are taking it. It's between dopes that they get on my nerves."

"Doctor Milsom speaks like a Christian and an artist," said Bridgers with sudden cheerfulness. "If I didn't dope, Van Heerden, I should not be working in your beastly factory, but would probably be one of the leading analytical chemists in America. But I'll go back to do my chore," he said, rising. "I suppose I get a little commission for restoring your palpitating bride? Milsom tells me that it is she. I thought it was the other dame—the Dutch girl. I guess I was a bit dopey."

Van Heerden frowned. "You take too keen an interest in my affairs," he said.

"Aw! You're getting touchy. If I didn't get interested in something, I'd go mad," chuckled Bridgers.

He had reached that stage of cocaine intoxication when the world was a very pleasant place, indeed, and full of subjects for jocularity.

"This place is getting right on my nerves," he went on. "Couldn't I go to London? I'm stagnating here. Why, some of the stuff I cultivated the other day wouldn't react. Isn't that so, Milsom? I get so dull in this hole that all bugs look alike to me."

Van Heerden glanced at the man who was addressed as Doctor Milsom, and the latter nodded.

"Let him go back," he said. "I'll look after him. How's the lady?" asked Milsom when they were alone.

The other made a gesture and Doctor Milsom nodded.

"It's good stuff," he said. "I used to give it to lunatics in the days of long ago."

Van Heerden did not ask him what those days were. He never pried too closely into the early lives of his associates, but Milsom's history was public property. Four years before he had completed a "life sentence" of fifteen years for a crime which had startled the world in ninety-nine.

"How are things generally?" he asked.

Van Heerden shrugged his shoulders. "For the first time I am getting nervous," he said. "It isn't so much the fear of Beale that rattles me, but the sordid question of money. The expenses are colossal and continuous."

"Hasn't your—government," Milsom balked at the word, "haven't your friends abroad moved in the matter yet?"

Van Heerden shook his head. "I am watching the papers very closely, especially the Agrarian papers, and unless I am mistaken there is a decided movement in the direction of support. But I can't depend on that. The marriage must go through tomorrow.

"White is getting nervous, too," he went on. "He is pestering me about the money I owe him, or rather the syndicate owes him. He's on the verge of ruin."

Milsom made a little grimace. "Then he'll squeal," he said. "Those kind of people always do. You'll have to keep him quiet. You say the marriage is coming off to-morrow?"

"I have notified the parson," said Van Heerden. "I told him my fiancée is too ill to attend the church and the ceremony must be performed here."

Milsom nodded. He had risen from the table and was looking out upon the pleasant garden at the rear of the house.

"A man could do worse than put in three or four weeks here," he said. "Look at that spread of green."

He pointed to an expanse of waving grasses, starred with the varicolored blossoms of wild flowers.

"I was never a lover of nature," said Van Heerden carelessly.

Milsom grunted. "You have never been in prison," he said cryptically. "Is it time to give your lady another dose?"

"Not for two hours," said Van Heerden. "I will play you piquet."

The cards were shuffled and the hands dealt when there was a scamper of feet in the hall, the door burst open, and a man ran in. He was wearing a soiled white smock and his face was distorted with terror.

"M'sieur! M'sieur!" he cried, "that imbecile Bridgers!"

"What's wrong?" Van Heerden sprang to his feet.

"I think he is mad. He is dancing about the grounds singing, and he has with him the preparation!"

Van Heerden rapped out an oath and leaped through the door, the other at his heels. They took the short cut and ran up the steps leading from the well courtyard and, bursting through the bushes, came within sight of the offender.

But he was not dancing now. He was standing with open mouth, staring stupidly about him.

"I dropped it—I dropped it!" he stammered.

There was no need for Van Heerden to ask what he had dropped, for the green lawn which had excited Milsom's admiration was no longer to be seen. In its place was a black irregular patch of earth which looked as though it had been blasted in the furnaces of hell, and the air was filled with the pungent mustiness of decay.

CHAPTER XIX.

OLIVIA IS WILLING.

It seemed that a gray curtain of mist hung before Olivia's eyes. It was a curtain spangled with tiny globes of dazzling light which grew from gray nothing and faded to nothing. Whenever she fixed her eyes upon one of these it straightway became two and three and then an uncountable quantity.

She felt that she ought to see faces of people she knew, for one half of her brain had cleared and was calmly diagnosing her condition, but doing so as though she were somebody else. She was emerging from a drugged sleep, she could regard herself in a curious impersonal fashion which was most interesting. And people who are drugged see things and people. Strange mirages of the mind arise and stranger illusions are suffered. Yet she saw nothing save this silvery gray curtain with its drifting spots of light and heard nothing except a voice saying: "Come along, come along, wake up." A hundred, a thousand times this monotonous order was repeated and then the gray curtain faded and she was lying on the bed, her head throbbing, her eyes hot and prickly and two men were looking down at her, one of them a big, barefaced man with a coarse mouth and sunken eyes.

"Was it my father, really?" she asked drowsily.

"I was afraid of that second dose you gave her last night," said Milsom. "You are getting a condition of coma and that's the last thing you want."

"She'll be all right now," replied Van Heerden, but his face was troubled. "The dose was severe—yet she seemed healthy enough to stand a three-minim injection."

Milsom shook his head. "She'll be all right now, but she might as easily have died," he said. "I shouldn't repeat the dose."

"There's no need," said Van Heerden.

"What time is it?" asked the girl and sat up. She felt very weak and weary, but she experienced no giddiness.

"It is twelve o'clock; you have been sleeping since seven last night. Let me see if you can stand. Get up."

She obeyed meekly. She had no desire to do anything but what she was told. Her mental condition was one of complete dependence, and had she been left to herself she would have been content to lie down again.

Yet she felt for a moment a most intense desire to propound some sort of plan which would give this man the money he wanted without going through a marriage ceremony. That desire lasted a minute and was succeeded by an added weariness as though this effort at independent thought had

added a new burden to her strength. She knew and was mildly amazed at the knowledge, that she was under the influence of a drug which was destroying her will, yet she felt no particular urge to make a fight for freedom of determination. "Freedom of determination." She repeated the words, having framed her thoughts with punctilious exactness, and remembered that that was a great war phrase which one was constantly discovering in the newspapers. All her thoughts were like this—they had the form of marshaled language, so that even her speculations were punctuated.

"Walk over to the window," said the doctor. She obeyed though her knees gave way with every step she took. "Now come back—good, you're all right."

She looked at him and did not flinch when he laid his two hands on her shoulders.

"You are going to be married this afternoon—that's all right, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said, "that is all right."

"And you'll say 'yes' when I tell you to say 'yes,' won't you?"

"Yes, I'll say that," she said.

All the time she knew that this was monstrously absurd. All the time she knew that she did not wish to marry this man. Fine sentences, pompously framed, slowly formed in her mind, such as: "This outrage will not go unpunished—comma—and you will suffer for this—comma—Doctor van Heerden—period."

But the effort of creating the protest exhausted her so that she could not utter it. And she knew that the words were stilted and artificial and the working cells of her brain whispered that she was recalling and adapting something she had heard at the theater. She wanted to do the easiest thing and it seemed absurdly easy to say "yes."

"You will stay here until the parson comes," said Van Heerden, "and you will not attempt to escape, will you?"

"No, I won't attempt to escape," she said.

"Lie down."

She sat on the bed and swung her feet clear of the ground, settling herself comfortably.

"She'll do," said Van Heerden satisfied. "Come downstairs, Milsom. I have something to say to you."

So they left her lying with her cheek on her hand, more absorbed in the pattern on the wall paper than in the tremendous events which threatened.

"Well, what's the trouble?" asked Milsom, seating himself by the table.

"This," said Van Heerden, and threw a letter across to him. "It came by one of my scouts this morning—I didn't go home last night. I cannot risk being shadowed here."

Milsom opened the letter slowly and read:

A man called upon you yesterday afternoon and has made several calls since. He was seen by Beale, who cross-examined him. Man calls himself Start, but is apparently not British. He is staying at Saraband Hotel, Berners Street.

"Who is this?" asked Milsom.

"I dare not hope——" replied the doctor.

"Suppose you dared, what form would your hope take?"

"I told you the other day," said Van Heerden, stopping before his companion, "that I had asked my government to assist me. Hitherto they have refused, that is why I am so desperately anxious to get this marriage through. I must have money. The Paddington place costs a small fortune—you go back there to-night, by the way."

Milsom nodded. "Has the government relented?" he asked.

"I don't know. I told you that certain significant items in the East Prussian newspapers seemed to hint that they were coming to my assistance. They have sent no word to me, but if they should agree they would send their agreement by messenger."

"And you think this may be the man?"

"It is likely."

"What have you done?"

"I have sent Gregory up to see the man. If he is what I hope he may be, Gregory will bring him here—I have given him the password."

"What difference will it make?" asked Milsom. "You are on to a big fortune anyway."

"Fortune?" The eyes of Doctor van Heerden sparkled and he seemed to expand at the splendor of the vision which was conjured to his eyes.

"No fortune which mortal man has ever possessed will be comparable. All the riches of all the world will lie at my feet. Milliards upon milliards——"

"In fact, a lot of money," said the practical Doctor Milsom. "Umph! I don't quite see how you are going to do it. In fact, you haven't taken me very much into your confidence, Van Heerden."

"You know everything."

Milsom chuckled. "I know that in the safe of my office you have a thousand sealed envelopes addressed, as I gather, to all the skallywags of the world, and I know pretty well what you intend doing, but how do you benefit? And how do I benefit?"

Van Heerden had recovered his self-possession. "You have already benefited," he said shortly, "more than you could have hoped."

There was an awkward pause, then Milsom asked:

"What effect is it going to have upon this country?"

"Please God, it will ruin England," said Van Heerden fervently, and the old criminal's eyes narrowed.

"Umph!" he said again, and there was a note in his voice which made Van Heerden look at him quickly.

"This country hasn't done very much for you," he sneered.

"And I haven't done much for this country—yet," countered the other.

The doctor laughed. "You're turning into a patriot in your old age," he said.

"Something like that," said Milsom easily. "There used to be a fellow at Portland—you have probably run across him—a clever crook named Homo, who used to be a parson before he got into trouble."

"I never met the gentleman, and talking of parsons," he said, looking at his watch, "our own padre is late. But I interrupted you."

"He was a man whose tongue I loathed and he hated me as poisonously," said Milsom with a little grimace. "But he used to say that patriotism was the only form of religion which survived penal servitude. And I suppose that's the case. I hate the thought of putting this country in wrong."

"You'll get over your scruples," said the other easily. "You are putting yourself in right, anyway. Think of the beautiful time you're going to have, my friend."

"I think of nothing else," said Milsom, "but still——" He shook his head.

Van Heerden had taken up the paper he had brought down and was reading it, and Milsom noted that he was perusing the produce columns.

"When do we make a start?"

"Next week," said the doctor. "I want to finish up the Paddington factory and get away."

"Where will you go?"

"I shall go to the continent," replied Van Heerden, folding up the paper and laying it on the table. "I can conduct operations from there with greater ease. Gregory goes to Canada. Mitchell and Samps have already organized Australia, and our three men in India will have ready workers."

"What about the States?"

Van Heerden nodded. "That has an organization of its own," he said. "It is costing me a lot of money. All the men except yourself are at their stations waiting for the word 'go.' You will take the Canadian supplies with you, by the way."

"Do I take Bridgers?"

Van Heerden shook his head. "I can't trust that fool. Otherwise, he would be an ideal assistant for you. Your work is simple. Before you leave I will give you a sealed envelope containing a list of all our Canadian agents. You will also find two code sentences, one of which means 'Commence operations' and the other 'Cancel all instructions and destroy apparatus.' "

"Will the latter be necessary?" asked Milsom.

"It may be, though it is very unlikely. But I must provide against all contingencies. I have made the organization as simple as possible. I have a chief agent in every country and on receipt of my message by the chief of the organization it will be repeated to the agents who also have a copy of the code."

"It seems too easy," said Milsom. "What chance is there of detection?"

"None whatever," said the doctor promptly. "Our only danger for the moment is this man Beale, but he knows nothing, and so long as we only have him guessing there is no great harm done—and anyway he hasn't much longer to guess."

"It seems much too simple," said Milsom, shaking his head.

Van Heerden had heard a footfall in the hall, stepped quickly to the door and opened it.

"Well, Gregory?" he said.

"He is here," replied the other, and waved his hand to a figure who stood behind him. "Also, the parson is coming down the road."

"Good; let us have our friend in."

The pink-faced foreigner with his stiff little mustache and his yellow boots stepped into the room, clicked his heels, and bowed.

"Have I the honor of addressing Doctor von Heerden?"

"*Van* Heerden," corrected the doctor with a smile, "that is my name."

Both men spoke in German.

"I have a letter for your excellency," said the messenger. "I have been seeking you for many days, and I wish to report that unauthorized persons have attempted to take this from me."

Van Heerden nodded, tore open the envelope, and read the half a dozen lines.

"The test word is 'Breslau,' " he said in a low voice, and the messenger beamed.

"I have the honor to convey to you the word." He whispered something in Van Heerden's ears, and Milsom, who did not understand German very well and had been trying to pick up a word or two, saw the look of exultation that came to the doctor's face.

He leaped back and threw out his arms and his strong voice rang with the words which the German hymnal has made famous:

"*Gott sei Dank durch alle Welt—Gott sei Dank durch alle Welt!*"

"What are you thanking God about?" asked Milsom.

"It's come, it's come!" cried Van Heerden, his eyes ablaze. "The government is with me, behind me—my beautiful country. Oh, *Gott sei Dank!*"

"The parson," warned Milsom.

A young man stood looking through the open door.

"The parson, yes," said Van Heerden. "There's no need for it, but we'll have this wedding. Yes, by heavens, we'll have it! Come in, sir."

He was almost boyishly jovial. Milsom had never seen him like that before.

"Come in, sir."

"I am sorry to hear your fiancée is ill," said the curate.

"Yes, yes, but that will not hinder the ceremony. I'll go myself and prepare her."

Milsom had walked round the table to the window and it was he who checked the doctor as he was leaving the room.

"Doctor," he said, "come here!"

Van Heerden detected a strain of anxiety in the other's voice.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Do you hear somebody speaking?"

They stood by the window and listened intently.

"Come with me," said the doctor, and walked noiselessly and ascended the stairs, followed more slowly by his heavier companion.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MARRIAGE.

A quarter of a mile from Deans Folly a motor car was halted on the side of a hill overlooking the valley in which Van Heerden's house was set.

"That's the house," said Beale, consulting the map, "and that wall that runs along the road is the wall the tramp described."

"You seem to put a lot of faith in the statement of a man suffering from delirium tremens," said Parson Homo dryly.

"He was not suffering from delirium tremens this morning. You didn't see him?"

Homo shook his head. "I was in London fixing the preliminaries of your nuptials," he said sarcastically. "It may be the house," he admitted. "Where is the entrance?"

"There's a road midway between here and the river and a private road leading off," said Beale. "The gate, I presume, is hidden somewhere in those bushes."

He raised a pair of field glasses and focused them.

"Yes, the gate's there," he said. "Do you see that man?"

Homo took the glasses and looked.

"Looks like a watcher," he said, "and if it is your friend's place the gate will be locked and barred. Why don't you get a warrant?"

Beale shook his head. "He'd get wind of it and be gone. No, our way in is over the wall. The hobo said there's a garden door somewhere."

They left the car and walked down the hill and presently came to a corner of the high wall which surrounded Deans Folly.

Beale passed on ahead. "Here's the door," he said.

He tried it gingerly and it gave a little.

"It's clogged and you won't get it open," said Homo. "It's the wall or nothing."

Beale looked up and down the road. There was nobody in sight and he made a leap, caught the top of the wall, and drew himself up. Luckily, the usual cheval-de-frise was absent. Beneath him and a little to the right was a shed built against the wall, the door of which was closed.

He signaled Homo to follow and dropped

to the ground. In a minute both men were sheltering in the clump of bushes where, on the previous day, Olivia had waited before making a dart for the garden door.

"There's been a fire here," said Homo in a low voice, and pointed to a big ugly patch of black amid the green.

Beale surveyed it carefully, then wormed his way through the bushes until he was within reach of the ruined plot. He stretched out his hand and pulled in a handful of the débris, examined it carefully, and stuffed it into his pocket.

"You are greatly interested in a grass fire," said Homo curiously.

"Yes, aren't I?" replied Beale.

They spent the next hour reconnoitering the ground. Once the door of the wall shed opened, two men came out and walked to the house, and they had to lie motionless until after a seemingly interminable interval they returned again, stopping in the middle of the black patch to talk. Beale saw one pointing to the ruin and the other shook his head and they both returned to the shed and the door closed behind them.

"There's somebody coming down the main drive," whispered Homo.

They were now near the house and from where they lay had a clear view of fifty yards of the drive.

"It's a brother brush!" said Homo in a chuckling whisper.

"A what?" asked Beale.

"A parson."

"A parson?"

He focused his glasses. Some one in clerical attire accompanied by the man whom Beale recognized as the guard of the gate, was walking quickly down the drive. There was no time to be lost. But now for the first time doubts assailed him. His great scheme seemed more fantastic and its difficulties more real. What could be easier than to spring out and intercept the clergyman, but would that save the girl? What force did the house hold? He had to deal with men who would stop short at nothing to achieve their purpose and one man in particular who had not hesitated at murder.

He felt his heart thumping, not at the thought of danger, though danger he knew was all round, but from sheer panic that he himself was about to play an unworthy part. Whatever fears or doubts he may have had suddenly fell away from him and he rose to his knees, for not twenty yards away at her window, her hands grasping the bars, her apathetic eyes looking listlessly toward where he crouched, was Olivia Cresswell.

Regardless of danger, he broke cover and ran toward her.

"Miss Cresswell," he called.

She looked at him across the concrete well without astonishment and without interest.

"It is you," she said with extraordinary calm.

He stood on the brink of the well, hesitating. It was too far to leap, and he remembered that behind the lilac bush he had seen a builder's plank. This he dragged out and passed it across the chasm, leaning the other end upon a ledge of brickwork which butted from the house.

He stepped quickly across, gripped the bars, and found a foothold on the ledge, the girl standing watching him without any sign of interest. He knew something was wrong. He could not even guess what that something was. This was not the girl he knew, but an Olivia Cresswell from whom all vitality and life had been sapped.

"You know me?" he said. "I am Mr. Beale."

"I know you are Mr. Beale," she replied evenly.

"I have come to save you," he said rapidly. "Will you trust me? I want you to trust me," he said earnestly, "I want you to summon every atom of faith you have in human nature and invest it in me. Will you do this for me?"

"I will do this for you," she said, like a child repeating a lesson.

"I—I want you to marry me." He realized as he said these words in what his fear was founded. He knew now that it was her refusal even to go through the form of marriage which he dared not face.

The truth leaped up to him and sent the blood pulsing through his head, that behind and beyond his professional care for her, he loved her. He waited with bated breath, expecting her amazement, her indignation, her distress. But she was serene and untroubled, did not so much as raise her eyelids by the fraction of an inch as she answered:

"I will marry you."

He tried to speak but could only mutter a hoarse: "Thank you."

He turned his head. Homo stood at the end of the plank, and he beckoned him.

Parson Homo came to the center of the frail bridge, slipped a prayer book from his tail pocket, and opened it.

"Dearly beloved, we are come together here in the sight of God to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony.

"I require and charge you both as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secret of all hearts shall be disclosed that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be joined together in matrimony ye do now confess it."

Beale's lips were tight pressed. The girl was looking serenely upward to a white cloud that sailed across the western skies.

Homo read quickly, but his enunciation was beautifully clear and Beale found himself wondering when last this man had performed so sacred an office. He asked the inevitable question and Beale answered. Homo hesitated, then turned to the girl.

"Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him and serve him, love, honor, and keep him in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?"

The girl did not immediately answer and the pause was painful to the two men, but for different reasons. Then she suddenly withdrew her gaze from the sky and looked Homo straight in the face.

"I will," she said.

The next question in the service he dispensed with. He placed their hands together and, together repeating his words, they plighted their troth. Homo leaned forward and again joined their hands and a note of unexpected solemnity vibrated in his voice when he spoke.

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

Beale drew a deep breath, then:

"Very pretty indeed," said a voice.

The detective swung across the window to bring the speaker into a line of fire.

"Put down your gun, admirable Mr. Beale." Van Heerden stood in the center of the room and the bulky figure of Milsom filled the doorway.

"Very pretty indeed, and most picturesque," said Van Heerden. "I didn't like to interrupt the ceremony. Perhaps you will now come into the house, Mr. Beale, and I will explain a few things to you. You need not trouble about your—wife. She will not be harmed."

Beale, revolver still in hand, made his way to the door and was admitted.

"You had better come along, Homo," he said. "We may have to bluff this out."

Van Heerden was waiting for him in the hall and invited him no farther.

"You are perfectly at liberty to take away your wife," said Van Heerden. "She will probably explain to you that I have treated her with every consideration. Here she is."

Olivia was descending the stairs with slow, deliberate steps.

"I might have been very angry with you," Van Heerden went on with that insolent drawl of his, "but happily I do not find it any longer necessary to marry Miss Cresswell. I was just explaining to this gentleman," he pointed to the pallid young curate in the background, "when your voices reached me. Nevertheless, I think it only right to tell you that your marriage is not a legal one, though I presume you are provided with a special license."

"Why is it illegal?" asked Beale.

He wondered if Parson Homo had been recognized.

"In the first place because it was not conducted in the presence of witnesses," said Van Heerden.

It was Homo who laughed.

"I am afraid that would make it illegal but for the fact that you witnessed the ceremony by your own confession and so presumably did your fat friend behind you."

Doctor Milsom scowled. "You were always a bitter dog to me, Parson," he said, "but I can give you a reason why it's illegal," he said triumphantly. "That man is Parson Homo, a well-known crook who was kicked out of the Church fifteen years ago. I worked alongside him in Portland."

Homo smiled sardonically. "You are right up to a certain point, Milsom," he said, "but you are wrong in one essential. By a curious oversight I was never unfrocked and I am still legally a priest of the Church of England."

"My God!" gasped Beale. "Then this marriage is legal!"

"As legal as it can possibly be," said Parson Homo complacently.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEALE SEES WHITE.

"In a sense," said Lawyer Kitson, "it is a tragedy. In a sense it is a comedy. The most fatal comedy of errors that could be imagined."

Stanford Beale sat on a low chair, his head in his hands, the picture of dejection.

"I don't mind your kicks," he said without looking up. "You can't say anything worse about me than I am saying about myself. Oh, I've been a fool, an arrogant, mad fool."

Kitson, his hands clasped behind his back under his coat tail, his gold-rimmed pince nez perched on his nose, looked down at the young man.

"I am not going to tell you that I was against the idea from the beginning because that is unnecessary. I ought to have put my foot down and stopped it. I heard you were pretty clever with a gun, Stanford. Why didn't you sail in and rescue the girl as soon as you found where she was?"

"I don't think there would have been a ghost of a chance," said the other, looking up. "I am not finding excuses, but I am telling you what I know. There were four or five men in the house and they were all pretty tough citizens—I doubt if I could have made it that way."

"You think he would have married her?"

"He admitted as much," said Stanford Beale, "the parson was already there when I butted in."

"What steps are you taking to deal with this man Van Heerden?"

Beale laughed helplessly. "I cannot take any until Miss Cresswell recovers."

"Mrs. Beale," murmured Kitson, and the other went red.

"I guess we'll call her Miss Cresswell, if you don't mind," he said sharply. "See here, Mr. Kitson, you needn't make things worse than they are. I can do nothing until she recovers and can give us a statement as to what happened. McNorton will execute the warrant just as soon as we can formulate a charge. In fact, he is waiting downstairs in the hope of seeing"—he paused—"Miss Cresswell. What does the doctor say?"

"She's sleeping now."

"It's maddening, maddening," groaned Beale, "and yet if it weren't so horrible I could laugh. Yesterday I was waiting for a hobo to come out of delirium tremens. Today I am waiting for Miss Cresswell to recover from some devilish drug. I've made a failure of it, Mr. Kitson."

"I'm afraid you have," said the other dryly. "What do you intend doing?"

"About Miss Cresswell?"

Kitson nodded.

"I can only give her an opportunity of divorcing me," said Beale.

"But does it occur to you?" asked Kitson slowly, "that this lady is not aware that she has married you and that we've got to break the news to her before we consider the question of a divorce? That's the part I don't like."

"And you can bet it doesn't fill me with rollicking high spirits," snapped Beale. "It's a most damnable situation."

"What are you going to do?" asked the other again.

"What are you going to do?" asked the exasperated Beale. "After all, you're her lawyer."

"And you're her husband," said Kitson grimly, "which reminds me," he walked to his desk and took up a slip of paper. "I drew this out against your coming. This is a certified check for four hundred thousand pounds, that is nearly two million dollars, which I am authorized to hand to Olivia's husband on the day of her wedding."

Beale took it from the other's fingers, read it carefully, and tore it into little pieces after which conversation flagged. After a while Beale asked:

"What do I have to do to get a divorce?"

"If you read the newspapers very carefully," said the lawyer with asperity, "you will discover."

There was another long silence.

"Is that the only way?"

"Well," said the lawyer, "by the English law if you leave your wife and go away and refuse to return to her she can apply to a judge of the high court who will order you to return within fourteen days."

"I'd come back in fourteen seconds if she wanted me," said Beale fervently.

"You're hopeless," said Kitson. "You asked how you could get a divorce. I presume you want one."

"Of course I do. I want to undo the whole of this horrible tangle. It's absurd and undignified. Can nothing be done without Miss Cresswell knowing?"

"Nothing can be done without your wife's knowledge," said Kitson.

He seemed to take a fiendish pleasure in reminding the unhappy young man of his misfortune.

"I am not blaming you," he said more soberly. "I blame myself. When I took this trust from poor John Millinborn I never realized all that it meant or all the responsibility it entailed. How could I imagine that the detective I employed to protect the girl from fortune hunters would marry her? I am not complaining," he said hastily, seeing the wrath rise in Beale's face. "It is very unfortunate, and you are as much the victim of circumstances as I. But unhappily we have not been the real victims."

"I suppose," said Beale looking up at the ceiling, "if I were one of those grand little medieval knights or one of those gallant gentlemen one reads about I should blow my brains out."

"That would be a solution," said Mr. Kitson, "but we should still have to explain to your wife that she was a widow."

"Then what in the name of Heaven am I to do?"

"Have a cigar," said Kitson.

He took two from his vest pocket and handed one to his companion and his shrewd old eyes twinkled.

"It's years and years since I read a romantic story," he said, "and I haven't followed the trend of modern literature very closely, but I think that your job is to sail in and make the lady love you."

Beale jumped to his feet.

"Do you mean that? Pshaw! It's absurd! It's ridiculous! She would never love me."

"I don't see why anybody should, least of all your wife," said Kitson, "but it would certainly simplify matters."

"And then?"

"Marry her all over again," said Kitson, sending a big ring of smoke into the air. "There's no law against it. You can marry as many times as you like, providing you marry the same woman."

"But suppose, suppose she loves somebody else?" asked Beale hoarsely.

"Why, then, it will be tough on you," said Kitson, "but tougher on her. Your business is to see that she doesn't love somebody else."

"But how?"

A look of infinite weariness passed across Kitson's face. He removed his glasses and put them carefully into their case.

"Really as a detective," he said, "you may be a prize exhibit, but as an ordinary human being you wouldn't even get a consolation prize. You have got me into a mess and you have got to get me out. John Millinborn was concerned only with one thing—the happiness of his niece. If you can make your wife, Mrs. Stanford Beale"—Beale groaned—"if you can make your good lady happy," said the remorseless lawyer, "my trust is fulfilled. I believe you are a white man, Beale," he said with a change in his tone, "and that her money means nothing to you. I may not be able to give a young man advice as to the best method of courting his wife, but I know something about human nature, and if you are not straight, I have made one of my biggest mistakes. My advice to you is to leave her alone for a day or two until she's quite recovered. You have plenty to occupy your mind. Go out and fix Van Heerden, but not for his treatment of the girl—she mustn't figure in a case of that kind for all the facts will come out. You think you have another charge against him, well prove it. That man killed John Millinborn, and I believe you can put him behind bars. As the guardian angel of Olivia Cresswell you have shown certain lamentable deficiencies," the smile in his eyes was infectious, and Stanford Beale smiled in sympathy. "In that capacity I have no further use for your services and you are fired, but you can consider yourself reëngaged on the spot to settle with Van Heerden. I will pay all the expenses of the chase—but get him."

He put out his hand and Stanford gripped it.

"You're a great man, sir," he breathed.

The old man chuckled. "And you may even be a great detective," he said. "In five minutes your Mr. Lassimus White will be here. You suggested I should send for him —who is he, by the way?"

"The managing director of Punsonby's. A friend of Van Heerden's and a shareholder in his Great Adventure."

"But he knows nothing?"

There was a tap at the door and a page boy came into the sitting room with a card.

"Show the gentleman up," said Kitson. "It is our friend," he explained.

"And he may know a great deal," said Beale.

Mr. White stalked into the room dangling his glasses with the one hand and holding his shiny silk hat with the other. He in-

variably carried his hat as though it was a rifle he were shouldering.

He bowed ceremoniously and closed the door behind him.

"Mr.—ah—Kitson?" he said, and advanced a big hand. "I received your note and am, as you will observe, punctual. I may say that my favorite motto is, 'punctuality is the politeness of princes.'"

"You know Mr. Beale?"

Mr. White bowed stiffly. "I have—ah—met Mr. Beale."

"In my unregenerate days," said Beale cheerfully, "but I am quite sober now."

"I am delighted to learn this," said Mr. White. "I am extremely glad to learn this."

"Mr. Kitson asked you to come, Mr. White, but really it is I who want to see you," said Beale. "To be perfectly frank, I learned that you were in some slight difficulty."

"Difficulty?" Mr. White bristled. "Me, sir, in difficulty? The head of the firm of Punsonby's whose credit stands, sir, as a model of sound industrial finance? Oh, no, sir."

Beale was taken aback. He had depended upon information which came from unimpeachable sources to secure the coöperation of this pompous windbag.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I understood that you had called a meeting of creditors and had offered to sell certain shares in a syndicate which I had hoped to take off your hands."

Mr. White inclined his head graciously. "It is true, sir," he said, "that I asked a few—ah—wholesale firms to meet me and to talk over things. It is also true that I—ah—had shares which had ceased to interest me, but those shares are sold."

"Sold—has Van Heerden bought them in?" asked Beale eagerly, and Mr. White nodded.

"Doctor van Heerden, a remarkable man, a truly remarkable man!" He shook his head as if he could not bring himself and never would bring himself to understand how remarkable a man the doctor was. "Doctor van Heerden has repurchased my shares, and they have made me a very handsome profit."

"When was this?" asked Beale.

Mr. White frowned. "I really cannot allow myself to be cross-examined, young man," he said severely. "By your accent I perceive that you are of trans-Atlantic origin, but I cannot allow you to hustle me—hustle, I believe is the word. The firm of Punsonby's——"

"Forget 'em," said Beale tersely. "Punsonby's has been on the verge of collapse for eight years. Let's get square, Mr. White. Punsonby's is a one-man company and you're that man. Its balance sheets are faked, its reserves are nonexistent. Its sinking fund is *spurlos versenkt*."

"Sir!"

"I tell you I know Punsonby's—I've had the best accountants in London working out your position, and I know you live from hand to mouth and that the margin between your business and bankruptcy is as near as the margin between you and prison."

Mr. White was very pale.

"But that isn't my business, and I dare say that the money Van Heerden paid you this morning will stave off your creditors. Anyway, I'm not running a Pure Business Campaign. I'm running a campaign against your German friend, Van Heerden."

"A German?" said the virtuous Mr. White in loud astonishment. "Surely not—a Holland gentleman——"

"He's a German, and you know it. You've been financing him in a scheme to ruin the greater part of Europe and the United States, to say nothing of Canada, South America, India, and Australia."

"I protest against such an inhuman charge," said Mr. White solemnly, and he rose, "I cannot stay here any longer——"

"If you go I'll lay information against you," said Beale. "I'm in dead earnest, so you can go or stay. First of all, I want to know in what form you received the money?"

"By check," replied White in a flurry.

"On what bank?"

"The London branch of the Swedland National Bank."

Beale nodded.

"A secret branch of the Dresdner Bank," said Beale. "That's promising. Has Doctor van Heerden ever paid you money before?"

By now Mr. White was the most tractable of witnesses. All his old assurance had vanished and his answers were almost apologetic in tone.

"Yes, Mr. Beale, small sums."

"On what bank?"

"On my own bank, the Counties & Midland."

"Good again. Have you ever known that he had an account elsewhere—for example you advanced him a very considerable sum of money, was your check cleared through the Swedland National Bank?"

White shook his head.

"No, sir—through my own bank."

Beale fingered his chin.

"Money this morning—and he took his loss in good part—that can only mean one thing." He nodded. "Mr. White, you have supplied me with valuable information."

"I trust I have said nothing which may—ah—incriminate one who has invariably treated me with the highest respect," Mr. White hastened to say.

"Not more than he is incriminated," smiled Stanford. "One more question. You know that Van Heerden is engaged in some sort of business—the business in which you invested your money. Where are his factories?"

But here Mr. White protested he could offer no information. He recalled, not without a sinking of heart, a similar cross-examination on the previous day at the hands of McNorton. There were factories—Van Heerden had hinted as much—but as to where they were located, well, confessed Mr. White, he hadn't the slightest idea.

"That's rubbish," said Beale roughly. "You know. Where did you communicate with Van Heerden? He wasn't always at his flat and you only came there twice."

"I assure you——" began Mr. White, alarmed by the other's vehemence.

"Assure nothing," thundered Beale. "Your policies won't sell—where did you see him?"

"On my honor ——"

"Let's keep jokes outside of the argument," said Beale truculently. "Where did you see him?"

"Believe me, I never saw him—if I had a message to send, my cashier—ah—Miss Glaum, an admirable young lady—carried it for me."

"Hilda Glaum!"

Beale struck his palm. Why had he not thought of Hilda Glaum before?

"That's about all I want to ask you, Mr. White," he said mildly. "You're a lucky man."

"Lucky, sir!" Mr. White recovered his hauteur as quickly as Beale's aggressiveness passed. "I fail to perceive my fortune. I fail to see, sir, where luck comes in."

"You have your money back," said Beale significantly. "If you hadn't been pressed for money and had not pressed Van Heerden, you would have whistled for it."

"Do you suggest," demanded White in his best judicial manner, "do you suggest in the presence of a witness with a due appreciation of the actionable character of your words that Doctor van Heerden is a common swindler?"

"Not common," replied Beale, "thank God!"

CHAPTER XXII.

HILDA GLAUM LEADS THE WAY.

Beale had a long consultation with McNorton at Scotland Yard, and on his return to the hotel had his dinner sent up to Kitson's private room and dined amid a litter of open newspapers. They were representative journals of the past week, and he scanned their columns carefully. Now and again he would cut out a paragraph and in one case half a column.

Kitson, who was dining with a friend in the restaurant of the hotel, came up toward nine o'clock and stood looking with amusement at the detective's silent labors.

"You're making a deplorable litter in my room," he said, "but I suppose there is something very mysterious and terrible behind it all. Do you mind my reading your cuttings?"

"Go ahead," said Beale without raising his eyes from his newspaper.

Kitson took up a slip and read aloud:

"The reserves of the Land Bank of the Ukraine have been increased by ten million roubles. This increase has very considerably eased the situation in southern Ukraine and in Galicia, where there has been considerable unrest amongst the peasants, due to the high cost of textiles."

"That is fascinating news," said Kitson sardonically. "Are you running a scrap book on high finance?"

"No," said the other shortly, "the Land Bank is a loan bank. It finances peasant proprietors."

"You a shareholder?" asked Mr. Kitson wonderingly.

"No."

Kitson picked up another cutting. It was a telegraphic dispatch dated from Berlin:

"As evidence of the healthy industrial tone which prevails in Germany, and the rapidity with which the government is recovering from the effects of the war, I may instance the fact

that an order has been placed with the Leipsiger Spoorwagen Gesselshaft for sixty thousand box cars. The order has been placed by the L. S. G. with thirty firms, and the first delivery is due in six weeks."

"That's exciting," said Kitson, "but why cut it out?"

The next cutting was also dated Berlin and announced the revival of the "War Purchase Council" of the old belligerent days as "a temporary measure."

Said the dispatch:

It is not intended to invest the committee with all its old functions, and the step has been taken in view of the bad potato crop to organize distribution.

"What's the joke about that?" asked Kitson, now puzzled.

"The joke is that there is no potato shortage—there never was such a good harvest," said Beale. "I keep tab on these things, and I know. The *Western Mail* had an article from its Berlin correspondent last week saying that potatoes were so plentiful that they were a drug on the market."

"H'm."

"Did you read about the Zeppelin sheds?" asked Beale. "You will find it among the others. All the old Zepp hangars throughout Germany are to be put in a state of repair and turned into skating rinks for the physical development of young Germany. Wonderful concrete floors are to be laid down, all the dilapidations are to be made good, and the band will play daily, wet or fine."

"What does it all mean?" asked the bewildered lawyer.

"That The Day—the Real Day is near at hand," said Beale soberly.

"War?"

"Against the world, but without the flash of a bayonet or the boom of a cannon. A war fought by men sitting in their little offices and pulling the strings that will choke you and me, Mr. Kitson. To-night I am going after Van Heerden. I may catch him and yet fail to arrest his evil work—that's a funny word, 'evil,' for everyday people to use, but there's no other like it. To-morrow, whether I catch him or not, I will tell you the story of the plot I accidentally discovered. The British government thinks that I have got on the track of a big thing—so does Washington—and I'm having all the help I want."

"It's a queer world," said Kitson.

"It may be queerer," responded Beale, then boldly: "How is my wife?"

"Your—well, I like your nerve!" gasped Kitson.

"I thought you preferred it that way—how is Miss Cresswell?"

"The nurse says she is doing famously. She is sleeping now, but she woke up for food and is nearly normal. She did not ask for you," he added pointedly.

Beale flushed and laughed. "My last attempt to be merry," he said, "I suppose that to-morrow she will be well."

"But not receiving visitors," Kitson was careful to warn him. "You will keep your mind off Olivia and keep your eye fixed on Van Heerden if you are wise. No man can serve two masters."

Stanford Beale looked at his watch.

"It is the hour," he said oracularly, and got up.

"I'll leave this untidiness for your man to clear," said Kitson. "Where do you go now?"

"To see Hilda Glaum—if the fates are kind," said Beale. "I'm going to put up a bluff, believing that in her panic she will lead me into the lion's den with the idea of Van Heerden making one mouthful of me. I've got to take that risk. If she is what I think she is, she'll lay a trap for me—I'll fall for it, but I'm going to get next to Van Heerden to-night."

Kitson accompanied him to the door of the hotel.

"Take no unnecessary risks," he said at parting. "Don't forget that you're a married man."

"That's one of the things I want to forget if you'll let me," said the exasperated young man.

Outside the hotel he hailed a passing taxi and was soon speeding through Piccadilly, westward. He turned by Hyde Park Corner, skirted the grounds of Buckingham Palace, and plunged into the maze of Pimlico. He pulled up before a dreary-looking house in a blank and dreary street and telling the cabman to wait, mounted the steps and rang the bell.

A diminutive maid opened the door.

"Is Miss Glaum in?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir. Will you step into the drawing-room. All the other boarders are out. What name shall I say?"

"Tell her a gentleman from Krooman Mansions," he answered diplomatically.

He walked into the tawdry parlor and put down his hat and stick and waited. Pres-

ently the door opened and the girl came in. She stopped open-mouthed with surprise at the sight of him, and her surprise deepened to suspicion.

"I thought——" she began and checked herself.

"You thought I was Doctor van Heerden. Well, I am not."

"You're the man I saw at Heyler's," she said, glowering at him.

"Yes, my name is Beale."

"Oh, I've heard about you. You'll get nothing by prying here," she cried.

"I shall get a great deal by prying here, I think," he said calmly. "Sit down, Miss Hilda Glaum, and let us understand one another. You are a friend of Doctor van Heerden's?"

"I shall answer no questions," she snapped.

"Perhaps you will answer this question," he said. "Why did Doctor van Heerden secure an appointment for you at Punsonby's, and why, when you were there, did you steal three registered envelopes which you conveyed to the doctor?"

Her face went red and white. "That's a lie!" she gasped.

"You might tell a judge and jury that and then they wouldn't believe you," he smiled. "Come, Miss Glaum, let us be absolutely frank with one another. I am telling you that I don't intend bringing your action to the notice of the police and you can give me a little information which will be very useful to me."

"It's a lie," she repeated, visibly agitated. "I did not steal anything. If Miss Cresswell says so——"

"Miss Cresswell is quite ignorant of your treachery," said the other quietly, "but as you are determined to deny that much, perhaps you will tell me this, what business brings you to Doctor van Heerden's flat in the small hours of the morning?"

"Do you insinuate——"

"I instinuate nothing. And least of all do I insinuate that you have any love affair with the doctor, who does not strike me as that kind of person."

Her eyes narrowed, and for a moment it seemed that her natural vanity would overcome her discretion.

"Who says I go to Doctor van Heerden's?"

"I say so, because I have seen you. Surely you don't forget that I live opposite the amiable doctor?"

"I am not going to discuss my business or his," she said, "and I don't care what you threaten me with or what you do."

"I will do something more than threaten you," he said ominously. "You will not fool me, Miss Glaum, and the sooner you realize the fact, the better. I am going all the way with you if you give me any trouble and if you don't answer my questions. I might tell you that unless this interview is a very satisfactory one to me I shall not only arrest Doctor van Heerden to-night, but I shall take you as an accomplice."

"You can't—you can't!" She almost screamed the words.

All the sullen restraint fell away from her and she was electric in the violence of her protest.

"Arrest him! That wonderful man! Arrest me? You dare not! You dare not!"

"I shall dare do lots of things unless you tell me what I want to know."

"What do you want to know?" she demanded defiantly.

"I want to know the most likely address at which your friend, the doctor, can be found—the fact is, Miss Glaum, the game is up—we know all about the Green Rust."

She stepped back, her hand raised to her mouth.

"The—the Green Rust!" she gasped. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have every reason to believe that Doctor van Heerden is engaged in a conspiracy against this state. He has disappeared, but is still in London. I want to take him quietly—without fuss."

Her eyes were fixed on his. He saw doubt, rage, a hint of fear, and finally a steady light of resolution shining. When she spoke her voice was calm.

"Very good. I will take you to the place," she said.

She went out of the room and came back five minutes later with her hat and coat on.

"It's a long way," she began.

"I have a taxi at the door."

"We cannot go all the way by taxi. Tell the man to drive to Baker Street," she said.

She spoke no word during the journey nor was Beale inclined for conversation. At Baker Street station they stopped and the cab was dismissed. Together they walked in silence, turning from the main road, passing the Central station and plunging into a

labyrinth of streets which was foreign territory to the American.

It seemed that he had passed in one step from one of the best-class quarters of the town to one of the worst. One minute he was passing through a sedate square lined with the houses of the well-to-do, another minute he was in a slum.

"The place is at the end of this street," she said.

They came to what seemed to be a stable-yard. There was a blank wall with one door and a pair of gates. The girl took a key from her bag, opened the small door and stepped in. Beale followed.

They were in a yard littered with casks. On two sides of the yard ran low-roofed buildings which had apparently been used as stables. She locked the door behind her, walked across the yard to the corner, and opened another door.

"There are fourteen steps down," she said. "Have you a light of any kind?"

He took his electric torch from his pocket.

"Give it to me," she said. "I will lead the way."

"What is this place?" he asked after she had locked the door.

"It used to be a wine merchant's," she said shortly. "We have the cellars."

"We?" he repeated.

She made no reply. At the bottom of the steps was a short passage and another door which was opened, and apparently the same key fitted them all, or else, as Beale suspected, she carried a pass key.

They walked through and again she closed the door behind them.

"Another?" he said as her light flashed upon a steel door a dozen paces ahead.

"It is the last one," she said, and went on.

Suddenly the light was extinguished.

"Your lamp's gone wrong," he heard her say, "but I can find the lock."

He heard a click, but did not see the door open and did not realize what had happened until he heard a click again. The light was suddenly flashed on him, level with his eyes.

"You can't see me," said a mocking voice. "I'm looking at you through the little spy hole. Did you see the spy hole, clever Mr. Beale? And I am on the other side of the door," he heard her laugh. "Are you going to arrest the doctor to-night?" she mocked. "Are you going to discover the secret of the Green Rust? Ah, that is what you want, isn't it?"

"My dear little friend," said Beale smoothly, "you will be very sensible and open that door. You don't suppose that I came here alone. I was shadowed all the way."

"You lie," she said coolly. "Why did I dismiss the cab and make you walk? Oh, clever Mr. Beale!"

He chuckled though he was in no chuckling mood.

"What a sense of humor!" he said admiringly. "Now just listen to me!"

He made one stride to the door, his revolver had flicked out of his hip pocket, when he heard the snap of a shutter and the barrel that he thrust between the bars met steel. Then came the grind of bolts and he pocketed his gun.

"So that's that," he said.

Then he walked back to the other door, struck a match and examined it.. It was sheathed with iron. He tapped the walls with his stick but found nothing to encourage him. The floor was solidly flagged, the low roof of the passage was vaulted and cased with stone.

He stopped in his search suddenly and listened. Above his head he heard a light patter of feet, and smiled. It was his boast that he never forgot a voice or a foot fall.

"That's my little friend on her way back running like the devil to tell the doctor," he said. "I have something under an hour before the shooting starts!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT THE DOCTOR'S FLAT.

Doctor van Heerden did not hurry his departure from his Staines house. He spent the morning following Olivia's marriage in town transacting certain important business and making no attempt to conceal his comings and goings, though he knew that he was shadowed. Yet he was well aware that every hour that passed brought danger nearer. He judged—and rightly—that his peril was not to be found in the consequences of his detention of Olivia Cresswell.

"I may have a week's grace," he said to Milsom, "and in the space of a week I can do all that I want."

He spent the evening superintending the dismantling of apparatus in the shed, and

it was past ten o'clock on Tuesday before he finished.

It was not until he was seated by Milsom's side in the big limousine and the car was running smoothly through Kingston that he made any further reference to the previous afternoon.

"Is Beale content?" he asked.

"Eh?"

Milsom, dozing in the corner of the car, awoke with a start.

"Is Beale content with his prize—and his predicament?" asked Van Heerden.

"Well, I guess he should be. That little job brings him a million. He should worry about anything further."

But Van Heerden shook his head. "I don't think you have things quite right, Milsom," he said. "Beale is a better man than I thought, and knows my mind a little too well. He was astounded when Homo claimed to be a priest. I never saw a man more stunned in my life. He intended the marriage as a bluff to keep me away from the girl. He analyzed the situation exactly, for he knew I was after her money and that she as a woman had no attraction for me. He believed—and there he was justified—that if I could not marry her I had no interest in detaining her and engaged Homo to follow him around with a special license. He timed everything too well for my comfort."

Milsom shifted round and peered anxiously at his companion.

"How do you mean?" he asked. "It was only by a fluke that he made it in time."

"That isn't what I mean. It is the fact that he knew that every second was vital, that he guessed I was keen on a quick marriage and that to forestall me he carried his —as he thought—pseudo-clergyman with him so that he need not lose a minute; these are the disturbing factors."

"I don't see it," said Milsom. "The fellow's a crook, all these Yankee detectives are grafters. He saw a chance of a big rake-off and took it; fifty-fifty of a million fortune is fine commission!"

Van Heerden shook his head.

"You're wrong. I'd like to think as you do. Man! Can't you see that his every action proves that he knows all about the Green Rust?"

"Huh?" Milsom sat up. "How—what makes you say that?"

"It's clear enough. He has already some idea of the scheme. He has been pumping old Heyler, he even secured a sample of the stuff—it was a faulty cultivation, but it might have been enough for him. He surmised that I had a special use for old Millinborn's money and why I was in a hurry to get it."

The silence which followed lasted several minutes.

"Does anybody except Beale know? If you settled him——"

"We should have to finish him to-night," said Van Heerden. "That is what I have been thinking about all day."

Another silence.

"Well, why not!" asked Milsom. "It is all one to me. The stake is worth a little extra risk."

"It must be done before he finds the Paddington place—that is the danger which haunts me." Van Heerden was uneasy, and he had lost the note of calm assurance which ordinarily characterized his speech. "There is sufficient evidence there to spoil everything."

"There is that," breathed Milsom. "It was madness to go on. You have all the stuff you want, you could have closed down the factory a week ago."

"I must have a margin of safety—besides, how could I do anything else? I was nearly broke and any sign of closing down would have brought my hungry workers to Krooman Mansions."

"That's true," agreed the other. "I've had to stall 'em off, but I didn't know that it was because you were broke. It seemed to me just a natural reluctance to part with good money."

Further conversation was arrested by the sudden stoppage of the car. Van Heerden peered through the window ahead and caught a glimpse of a red lamp.

"It is all right," he said. "This must be Putney Common, and I told Gregory to meet me with any news."

A man came into the rays of the headlamp and passed to the door.

"Well," asked the doctor, "is there any trouble?"

"I saw the green lamp on the bonnet," said Gregory—Milsom no longer wondered how the man had recognized the car from the score of others which pass over the common—"there is no news of importance."

"Where is Beale?"

"At the old man's hotel. He has been there all day."

"Has he made any further visits to the police?"

"He was at Scotland Yard this afternoon."

"And the young lady?"

"One of the waiters at the hotel, a friend of mine, told me that she is much better. She has had two doctors."

"And still lives?" said the cynical Milsom. "That makes four doctors she has seen in two days."

Van Heerden leaned out of the car window and lowered his voice.

"The Fraülein Glaum, you saw her?"

"Yes, I told her that she must not come to your laboratory again until you sent for her. She asks when you leave."

"That she must not know, Gregory—please remember."

He withdrew his head, tapped at the window, and the car moved on.

"There's another problem for you, Van Heerden," said Milsom with a chuckle.

"What?" demanded the other sharply.

"Hilda Glaum. I've only seen the girl twice or so, but she adores you. What are you going to do with her?"

Van Heerden lit a cigarette, and in the play of the flame Milsom saw him smiling.

"She comes on after me," he said. "By which I mean that I have a place for her in my country, but not——"

"Not the sort of place she expects," finished Milsom bluntly. "You may have trouble there."

"Bah!"

"That's foolish," said Milsom. "The convict establishments of England are filled with men who said 'bah!' when they were warned against jealous women. If," he went on, "if you could eliminate jealousy from the human outfit, you'd have half the prison warders of England unemployed."

"Hilda is a good girl," said the other complacently. "She is also a good German girl and in Germany women know their place in the system. She will be satisfied with what I give her."

"There aren't any women like that," said Milsom with decision, and the subject dropped.

The car stopped near the Marble Arch to put down Milsom, and Van Heerden continued his journey alone, reaching his apartments a little before midnight. As he stepped out of the car a man strolled across the street. It was Beale's watcher. Van Heerden looked round with a smile, realizing the significance of this nonchalant figure and passed through the lobby and up the stairs.

He had left his lights full on for the benefit of watchers and the hall lamp glowed convincingly through the fanlight. Beale's flat was in darkness, and a slip of paper fastened to the door gave his address.

The doctor let himself in to his own rooms, closed the door; and switched out the light.

"Hello!" he said angrily. "What are you doing here—I told you not to come?"

The girl who was sitting at the table and who now rose to meet him was breathless and he read trouble in her face. He could have read pride there, too, that she had so well served the man whom she idolized as a god.

"I've got him, I've got him, Julius!"

"Got him! Got whom?" he asked with a frown.

"Beale!" she said eagerly, "the great Beale!"

She gurgled with hysterical laughter.

"He came to me, he was going to arrest me to-night, but I got him."

"Sit down," he said firmly, "and try to be coherent, Hilda. Who came to you?"

"Beale. He came to my boarding house and wanted to know where you had taken Olivia Cresswell. Have you taken her?" she asked earnestly.

"Go on," he said.

"He came to me full of arrogance and threats. He was going to have me arrested, Julius, because of those letters which I gave you. But I didn't worry about myself, Julius. It was all for you that I thought. The thought that you, my dear great man, should be put in one of these horrible English prisons—oh, Julius!"

She rose, her eyes filled with tears, but he stood over her, laid his hands on her shoulders, and pressed her back.

"Now, now. You must tell me everything. This is very serious. What happened then?"

"He wanted me to take him to one of the places."

"One of what places?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know. He only said that he knew that you had other houses—I don't even know that he said that, but that was

the impression that he gave me, that he knew you were to be found somewhere."

"Go on," said the doctor.

"And so I thought and I thought," said the girl, her hands clasped in front of her, her eyes looking up into his, "and I prayed God would give me some idea to help you. I said I would lead him to you."

"You said you would lead him to me?" he said steadily, "and where did you lead him?"

"To the factory in Paddington," she said.

"Great God!" He stared at her.

"Wait, wait, wait!" she said. "Oh, please don't blame me! I took him into the passage with the doors. I borrowed his light, and, after we had passed and locked the second door, I slipped through the third and slammed it in his face."

"Then——"

"He is there! Caught! Oh, Julius, did I do well? Please don't be angry with me! I was so afraid for you!"

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Not ten minutes, perhaps five minutes. I don't know. I have no knowledge of time. I came straight back to see you."

He stood by the table, gnawing his fingers, his head bowed in concentrated thought.

"There, of all places!" he muttered, "there, of all places!"

"Oh, Julius, I did my best," she said tearfully.

He looked down at her with a little sneer.

"Of course you did your best. You're a woman and you haven't brains."

"I thought——"

"You thought!" he sneered, "God! Who told you you could think? You fool! Don't you know it was a bluff, that he could no more arrest me than I could arrest him? Don't you realize—did he know you were in the habit of coming here?"

She nodded.

"I thought so," said Van Heerden with a bitter laugh. "He knows you are in love with me, and he played upon your fears. You poor little fool! Don't cry, or I shall do something unpleasant. There, there. Help yourself to some wine. You'll find it in the tantalus."

He strode up and down the room.

"There's nothing to be done but to settle accounts with Mr. Beale," he said grimly. "Do you think he was watched?"

"Oh, no, no, Julius!" She checked her sobs. "I was so careful."

She gave him a description of the journey and the precautions she had taken, and he nodded.

"Well, perhaps you're not such a fool after all."

He unlocked a drawer in his desk and took out a long-barreled Browning pistol, withdrew the magazine from the butt, examined and replaced it, and slipped back the cover.

"Yes, I think I must settle accounts with this gentleman, but I don't want to use this," he added thoughtfully, as he pushed up the safety catch and dropped the weapon in his pocket. "We might be able to gas him. Anyway, you can do no more good, or harm," he said cynically.

She was speechless. Her hands clasped tightly at her breast covered a damp ball of handkerchief, and her tear-stained face was upturned to his.

"Now, dry your face." He stooped and kissed her lightly on the cheek. "Perhaps what you have done is the best after all. Who knows? Anyway," he said speaking his thoughts aloud, "Beale knows about the Green Rust, and it can't be very long before I have to go to earth, but only for a little time, my Hilda." He smiled, showing his white teeth, but it was not a pleasant smile. "Only for a little time, and then," he threw up his arms, "we shall be rich beyond the dreams of Frankfurt."

"You will succeed, I know you will succeed, Julius," she breathed. "If I could only help you! If you would only tell me what you are doing! What is the Green Rust? Is it some wonderful new explosive?"

"Dry your face and go home," he said shortly. "You will find a detective outside the door watching you, but I do not think he will follow you."

He dismissed the girl and followed her after an interval of time, striding boldly past the shadow and gaining the cab stand in Shaftesbury Avenue without, so far as he could see, being followed. But he dismissed the cab in the neighborhood of Baker Street and continued his journey on foot. He opened the little door leading into the yard, but did not follow the same direction as the girl had led Stanford Beale. It was through another door that he entered the vault which at one time had been the innocent repository of bubbling life and was now the factory where men worked diligently for the destruction of their fellows.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GREEN RUST FACTORY.

Stanford Beale spent a thoughtful three minutes in the darkness of the cellar passage to which Hilda Glaum had led him, and then he began a careful search of his pockets. He carried a little silver cigar lighter which had fortunately been charged with petrol that afternoon, and this afforded him a beam of adequate means to take note of his surroundings.

The space between the two locked doors was ten feet, the width of the passage three, the height about seven feet. The roof, as he had already noted, was vaulted. Now he saw that along the center ran a strip of beading. There had evidently been an electric light installation here, probably before the new owners took possession, for at intervals was a socket for an electric bulb. The new occupants had covered these and the rest of the wall with whitewash, and yet the beading and the electric fittings looked comparatively new. One wall, that on his left as he had come in, revealed nothing under his close inspection, but on the right wall, midway between the two doors there had been a notice painted in white letters on a black background and this showed faintly through the thick coating of distemper which had been applied. He damped a handkerchief with his tongue and rubbed away some of the whitewash where the letters were least legible, and read:

AID
LTER.

ULANCE &
T AID.

This was evidently half an inscription which had been cut off exactly in the middle. To the left there was no sign of lettering. He puzzled the letters for a few moments before he came to an understanding.

"'Air-raid shelter. Ambulance and first aid,'" he read.

So that explained the new electric fittings. It was one of those underground cellars which had been ferreted out by the municipality or the government for the shelter of the people in the neighborhood during air raids in the Great War. Evidently there was extensive accommodation here, since this was also an ambulance post. Faintly discernible beneath the letters was a painted white hand which pointed downward. What had happened to the other half of the inscription? Obviously it had been painted on the door leading into the first-aid room, and as obviously that door had been removed and had been bricked up. In the light of this discovery he made a more careful inspection of the wall to the left. For the space of four feet the brickwork was new. He tapped it. It sounded hollow. Pressing his back against the opposite wall to give him leverage, he put his foot against the new brickwork and pushed.

He knew that the class of workmanship which was put into this kind of job was not of the best, that only one layer of brick was applied, and it was a mechanical fact that pressure applied to the center of new work would produce a collapse.

At the first push he felt the wall sag. Releasing his pressure, it came back. This time he put both feet against the wall, and, bracing his shoulders, he put every ounce of strength in his body into a mighty heave. The next second he was lying on his back. The greater part of the wall had collapsed. He was curious enough to examine the work he had demolished. It had evidently been done by amateurs, and the whitewash which had been thickly applied to the passage was explained.

A current of fresh air came to meet him as he stepped gingerly across the débris. A flight of six stone steps led down to a small room containing a sink and a water supply, two camp beds which had evidently been part of the ambulance equipment and which the new owners had not thought necessary to remove, and a broken chair. The room was still littered with the paraphernalia of first aid. He found odd ends of bandages, empty medicine bottles, and a broken glass measure on the shelf above the sink.

What interested him more was a door which he had not dared to hope he would find. It was bolted on his side, and, when he had slid this back, he discovered to his relief that it was not locked. He opened it carefully, first extinguishing his light. Beyond the door was darkness, and he snapped back the light again. The room led to another, likewise empty. There were a number of shelves, a few old wine bins, a score of empty bottles, but nothing else. At the far corner was yet another door, also bolted on the inside. Evidently, Van Heerden did not intend this part of the vault to be used.

He looked at the lock and found it was broken. He must be approaching the main workroom in this new factory, and it was necessary to proceed with caution. He took out his revolver, spun the cylinder, and thrust it under his waistcoat, the butt ready to his hand. The drawing of the bolts was a long business. He could not afford to risk detection at this hour and could only move them by a fraction of an inch at the time. Presently his work was done, and he pulled the door cautiously.

Instantly there appeared between door and jamb a bright green line of light. He dare not move it any farther, for he heard now the shuffle of feet and occasionally the sound of hollow voices, muffled and indistinguishable. In that light the opening of the door would be seen, perhaps by a dozen pairs of eyes. For all he knew, every man in that room might be facing his way. He had expected to hear the noise of machinery, but beyond the strangled voices, occasionally the click of glass against glass and the chuff-chuff-chuff of slippered feet crossing the floor, he heard nothing.

He pulled the door another quarter of an inch and glued his eye to the crack. At this angle he could only see one of the walls of the big vault and the end of a long vapor lamp which stood in one of the cornices and which supplied the ghastly light. But presently he saw something which filled him with hope. Against the wall was a high shadow which even the overhead lamp did not wholly neutralize. It was an irregular shadow such as a stack of boxes might make, and it occurred to him that, perhaps, beyond his range of vision there was a barricade of empty cases which hid the door from the rest of the room.

He spent nearly three-quarters of an hour taking a bearing based upon the problematical position of the lights, the height and density of the box screen, and then boldly and rapidly opened the door, stepped through, and closed it behind him. His calculations had been accurate. He found himself in a room, the extent of which he could only conjecture. What, however, interested him mostly was the accuracy of his calculation that the door was hidden. An "L" shaped stack of crates was piled within two feet of the ceiling and formed a little lobby to anybody entering the vault the way Beale had come. They were stacked neatly and methodically, and with the exception of two large packing cases which formed the "corner stone," the barrier was made of a large number of small boxes about ten inches square.

There was a small stepladder, evidently used by the person whose business it was to keep this stack in order. Beale lifted it noiselessly, planted it against the corner, and mounted cautiously.

He saw a large broad chamber, its groined roof supported by six squat stone pillars. Light came not only from mercurial lamps affixed to the ceiling, but from others suspended above the three rows of benches which ran the length of the room. Mercurial lamps do not give a green light, as he knew, but a violent violet light, and the green effect was produced by shades of something which Beale thought was yellow silk but which he afterward discovered was tinted mica.

At intervals along the benches sat white-clad figures, their faces hidden behind rubber masks, their hands covered with gloves. In front of each man was a small microscope under a glass shade, a pair of balances, and a rack filled with shallow porcelain trays. Evidently the work on which they were engaged did not endanger their eyesight, for the eye pieces in the masks were innocent of protective covering, a circumstance which added to the hideous animallike appearance of the men. They all looked alike in their uniform garb, but one figure alone Beale recognized. There was no mistaking the stumpy form and the big head of the Herr Professor whose appearance in Olivia Cresswell's room had so terrified that young lady.

He had expected to see him, for he knew that this old German, poverty-stricken and ill-favored, had been roped in by Van Heerden, and Beale, who pitied the old man, had been engaged for a fortnight in trying to worm from the ex-professor of chemistry at the University of Heidelberg, the location of Van Heerden's secret laboratory. His efforts had been unsuccessful. There was a streak of loyalty in the old man, which had excited an irritable admiration in the detective, but had produced nothing more.

Beale's eyes followed the benches and took in every detail. Some of the men were evidently engaged in tests and remained all the time with their eyes glued to their microscopes. Others were looking into their porcelain trays and stirring the contents

with glass rods, now and again transferring something to a glass slide which was placed on the microscope and earnestly examined.

Beale was conscious of a faint, musty odor permeating the air, an indescribable earthy smell with a tang to it which made the delicate membranes of the nostrils smart and ache. He tied his handkerchief over his nose and mouth before he took another peep. Only part of the room was visible from his post of observation. What was going on immediately beneath the far side of the screen he could only conjecture. But he saw enough to convince him that this was the principal factory, from whence Van Heerden was distilling the poison with which he planned humanity's death.

Some of the workers were filling and sealing small test tubes with the contents of dishes. These tubes were extraordinarily delicate of structure, and Beale saw at least three crumble and shiver in the hands of the fillers.

Every bench held a hundred or so of these tubes and a covered gas jet for heating the wax. The work went on methodically, with very little conversation between the masked figures. He saw that the masks covered the heads of the chemists so that not a vestige of hair showed. Only occasionally did one of them leave his seat and disappear through a door at the far end of the room, which apparently led to a canteen.

Evidently the fumes against which they were protected were not virulent, for some of the men stripped their masks as soon as they left their benches.

For half an hour he watched, and in the course of that time saw the process of filling the small boxes which formed his barrier and hiding place, with the sealed tubes. He observed the care with which the fragile tubes were placed in their beds of cotton wool and had a glimpse of the lined interior of one of the boxes. He was on the point of lifting down a box to make a more thorough examination when he heard a quavering voice beneath him.

"What you doing here—eh?"

Under the stepladder was one of the workers who had slipped noiselessly round the corner of the pile and now stood grotesque and menacing, his uncovered eyes glowering at the intruder, the black barrel of his Browning pistol covering the detective's heart.

"Don't shoot, colonel," said Beale softly, "I'll come down."

TO BE CONCLUDED.

SOME EXCUSE FOR KICKING

"BARNEY" BARUCH, President Wilson's adviser on "business" policy, listened, attentive and silent, to a tale of woe narrated to him by a capitalist.

The complaint was that the regulations and restrictions laid down by Mr. Baruch's board narrowly escaped putting the men in that line of business completely out of the running. They did not see how they could continue their plants. They were left nothing.

Mr. Baruch was impressed by the presentation of the case.

"You're not given much," he said with his quick, sympathetic smile. "You're like the Irishman who refused to pay his doctor's bill, specifying as his reason that the doctor had done nothing for him, really had given him nothing.

"'What do I pay him for?' he demanded hotly. 'All he gave me was some emetics an' I couldn't keep so much as a drop uv them on my stomach!'"

Another Coolidge Serial!

Those who enjoyed—and who didn't?—"Rim-rock Jones" and "Shadow Mountain" will be happy to hear that we will begin Dane Coolidge's latest novel in the next POPULAR, dated September 20:

"FATE AND THE FIGHTER"

Too Many Games

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "The Hygeenic Kid," Etc.

Illustrating once more how hard it is to do two things at the same time and get away with it. As the teller of the story says: "You can't talk a man into buyin' ten thousand dollars' worth of life insurance he don't want while your mind is driftin' into pleasant thoughts of three-cushion billiards"

ONE game at a time is usu'lly about all the ordinary rent payer can handle. I don't recall a case where the local pool shark also owned the biggest store in town. The birds that are consistent about addin' to the family silver chest by their uncanny skill with a bundle of golf bats ain't winnin' places on boards of directors at the same time.

I ain't denyin' that a feller may be makin' a howlin' success of runnin' a feed store, and still know enough not to bid over four hundred on a hand that's a mosaic of nines and jacks when he drops around to the Elks' Home to give the boys a whirl at pinochle. No, all of us has the right to have some pet pastime into which we can throw ourselves with utter abandon in our spare moments. But that's the point—make sure they are your *spare* moments. You can't talk a man into buyin' ten thousand dollars' worth of life insurance he don't want while your mind's driftin' into pleasant thoughts of three-cushion billiards. Neither can you maintain your high average at 18.2 balk line when you're wonderin' how you're goin' to meet this week's pay roll. You've got to make a choice, and, havin' made it, stick to it. Prohibition's takin' care of the well-known booze-or-business (?) problem that many of us have set up nights tryin' to solve, but you can't expect Congress to amend the constitution and strike a death blow at personal liberty ev'ry time you get fond of some distraction that makes the gatherin' of your board money a painful burden.

I once seen a feller that seemed to have two lines of endeavor pretty well in his grasp—retail merchandisin' and pugilism. He was a newsboy, and when I encountered him first, he was defendin' his right to hawk his wares at the juncture of Frankfort Street and Park Row against all comers. I'd just stepped off the bridge, after ridin' up from the Sheepshead Bay track, and my attention was distracted to riotous proceedin's that was bein' effected in front of the World Buildin'.

A little, black-haired, sharp-faced kid was repellin' the onslaught of about a dozen other boys by means of his skillful manipulation of a hank of bananas which he'd seized from the guinea fruit stand on the corner. He was greatly outnumbered, but in the matter of strategic position, armament, and morale, the odds was all in his favor. His manner of swingin' that congestion of fruit was unresistable! The air was filled with flyin' bananas, loosened from the parent branch by contact with the skulls of the attackin' party. The ground was covered with skins, the mushed-up former fillin's of same and the still forms of those who had felt the deadenin' force of the kid's queer weepon. From the battle ground rose an odor like you get in office buildin's just after they've gilded the radiators.

With his back to the window of the corner store, thereby cuttin' off the chance of envelopin' movements by the foe, the kid used his bananas in turn as batterin'-ram, club, and bayonet—dependin' on the enemy's method of attack. His aim was unerrin'. Never did he lunge, swing, or thrust without an answerin' dull thud as one of his adversities hit the deck.

By the time I managed to work my way through the crowd the intenseness of the battle was wanin'. Some of the assailin' forces who were still able to move were retreatin' in panic. Those in whose breasts the fire of battle had not yet died were shakin' like shimmy dancers and accom-

plishin' wicked footwork as they attacked—due to the precocious footin' they were able to find on a sidewalk that was carpeted with banana skins.

Evidently the banana boy was goin' to be satisfied with no mere technical vict'ry, for, when only three of the others was left and they showed signs of desirin' to slide out graceful, before disgrace was added to the beatin' they'd got, he went after *them.*

Bang! sounded the heavy banana stalk on one head. Crash! landed the butt end of it on a jaw. And that left but one of the attackin' party still standin'.

The little kid hurled his weepon from him.

"Come on, you!" he barked at the other boy, who was a full head taller than him; and he put up his fists.

"Some game little sport!" I murmured to myself. "He won't take the advantage of a weepon, now that there's only two of them left!"

The big boy looked like he couldn't believe his eyes. You could see from the grin that suddenly covered his face that the little kid, without no bananas to defend himself with, looked like the softest kind of pickin's to him. He put his head down and rushed.

The little feller dropped back to a part of the sidewalk that was fairly free of banana skins, and set himself. As the other boy shot toward him, he side-stepped and let go a vicious swing. His fist hit the big boy's jaw with a crack like a dog whip. How a skinny little feller like him packed such a punch, I don't know; but he laid that big boy out colder than a cod in a fish market.

He looked about him to see if any of those he had finished earlier had come to and were lookin' for any more, and then dashed over to the corner to pick up his bundle of papers. The wop who owned the fruit stand had been jabberin' away in guinea all during the battle—prayin', or cursin', or somethin'; it all sounds the same in them dago tongues—and now he butted in.

"Hey, Joe!" he wailed, grabbin' the kid by the arm. "All my banan'!" He pointed to the sidewalk, which was a street cleaner's dream! "What a mat' you?" the fruit seller asked.

"How much yuh want?" said the kid, diggin' into his pants pocket.

"T'ree do-lar," said Tony, suddenly grinnin'.

"All right," said the kid. "Here's four. De extry buck's fer cleanin' up de street so's my customers kin git to me. Yah! Ev'nin' papers! Read all about de big moider!" he shouted, goin' right about his business like the battle royal he'd just had was only an advertisin' dodge to draw the crowds to his corner. It had that effect, too, for the homegoers just about mobbed him tryin' to take his papers off his hands.

I stood there watchin' him, grinnin' admirin'ly.

"Some battler!" I thought. "You know your rights, and you're goin' to get them! If some of the kids that are ridin' my horses had your pep——"

I stopped, and looked close at the boy. I'd just been hit by an idea.

"Why not?" I asked myself. "He's small; he's strong as a little bull, and active as a cat. Why *can't* he make a jockey? By George, it's worth takin' a flyer on at that!"

I dived over to the corner, upsettin' two or three citizens who were fightin' to get their papers, and shoved a five-dollar bill into the kid's hand.

"I'm buyin' you out!" I told him, and I grabbed the papers from him and heaved the whole bundle halfway across to the city hall.

"Divide them among you!" I shouted to the crowd, who, inspired by the thought of gettin' somethin' for nothin', caused disgraceful scenes by their wild rush to get where the papers had fallen.

"Come on; I want to talk to you," I said to the kid, seizin' him by the arm and haulin' him around the corner.

He made two or three swings at me, which I blocked. Also, he used some highly uncultivated language. He thought I was a flat-foot, I guess, tryin' to pinch him for his part in the previous riot. I finally quieted him by callin' attention to the five-spot I'd handed him, addin' the explanation that it more than paid him for his papers and the valu'ble time I was takin' from him.

"What was the idea of the fight you just had?" I asked him.

"Ah-r!" he barked. "One o' dem guys wants me corner. I gibbim his beatin's a coupla times, so he gits his gang an' tries to do me up."

"Ain't he got a corner of his own?" I asked.

"Sure!" said the kid. "But he usta have dis one, an' he wants it back!"

"Oh," I observed, "you took it from him!"

"Sure, I did!"

"Then it's really his corner?"

"Like 'ell it is! I licked him, didn't I?"

Well, that's the way a whole lot of things in this world is took—by lickin' the feller that's got them! The rail, for instance, when a field's roundin' the turn into the stretch. A lot of highly successful people reason just the same as this kid: the other guy don't own nothin' until he's licked ev'rybody else that wants it.

"Didn't you have a corner before this one?" I asked the kid.

"Sure!" he said. "A better one dan dis! made more dough dere, I mean!"

"More dough!" I exclaimed. "Then why do you want this one?"

"Oh," he said carelesslike, "I wan'ed tuh beat dat guy up anyways; besides, I knew dere'd be lots o' action here."

"Action?"

"Sure! I have t'ree or four fights a week! On me odder corner dere was nottin' doin' —ever. I didn't git inter a scrap a mont'!"

"But you was makin' more money," I objected. "Didn't your folks——"

"Ain't got none," he said.

"How old are you?" I asked him.

"Sixteen."

"What do you weigh?"

"Hey!" he exclaimed, lookin' at me suspicious. "Are you from de Gerry Soci'ty? 'Cause if yuh are, yuh're in wrong. I'm ol' enough tuh——"

"I ain't," I said.

"Well, whadda yuh doin'—takin' de census?"

"No," I said. "You like to fight, don't you?"

"Like a pig likes swill!" he exclaimed, makin' it sound like a real appropriate remark.

"Well, son," I said, plungin' right into the middle of things, "how'd you like to go where you got to fight ev'ry——"

"The ring?" he gasped, his eyes shinin'.

"Somethin' like it," I said. "Ridin' race horses."

"Ah-r, ease off!" he grunted. "I ain't never been on a horse in me life!"

"You'll never start younger," I told him. "I'm on the level about this. My name's Jerry Sweeney. I'm a horse trainer. I seen you battlin' just now, and thought you had the build of a rider. Want to try it?"

"What's in it?" he asked.

"Lots of money," I said, "and plenty of fightin'."

"Right away?"

"Well," I said, "you can begin fightin' as soon as you like. You'll have to learn to ride, though, before you get much money. But I'll tell you what I'll do," I exclaimed, when he seemed to hesitate. "I'll pay you what you average sellin' papers if you'll come down to the track and see what you can do as a rider. How about it?"

"All right," he said.

His name, as near as he knew, was Joe Carter. That monicker had been selected out of the city direct'ry or somethin' for him by the sup'rintendent of the foundlin' asylum that was the only home he'd knew until he was eleven. He'd left the asylum flat five years before, due to a disagreement he had there on account of his then developin' leanin's toward pugilism. He'd licked ev'ry kid in the place up to the age of thirteen, and was startin' through them again when the sup'rintendent took him gently by the ear one day, and began to preach peace and gentlemanliness with a strap. Joe wriggled away before the sermon was finished, and offered a contrary argument with a light chair. The chair breakin' the first time it fell on the sup'rintendent's dome, Joe became scared lest he be punished for destroyin' asylum property and plunged through a window without botherin' to open it. When the sup'rintendent come to, he persecuted a vigorous search, but Joe was seen in them parts no more. Since then he'd been on his own, and I don't mind tellin' you he was tougher than his early hist'ry.

I had to separate him from three stableboys to whom he was learnin' the rudiments of the manly art the first time he came to the track. I was a little late gettin' out to the barn that mornin', and Joe, who was prompt about keepin' the date I'd made with him, decided to kill time by murderin' my exercise boys, who he found indulgin' in a little practice with the bones. With the single and sole purpose of startin' an argument, Joe, who had no int'rest, financial or otherwise, in the game, accused one of the players of cheatin'. The accusation bein' denied, Joe hauled off and hit the defendant. The resultin' battle was so one-sided that Joe taunted the other two with cowardice in refusin' to aid their friend, thereby

bringin' them into the fracas and makin' it more int'restin' for him. He was givin' the whole three of them plenty to do when I arrived and quelled the disturbance.

With an idea of accustomin' him to the motion of a horse, I sent him out for a little canter on the back of King Spavin, our stable pony. That fat little beast, of course, wasn't able to raise a good gallop, and Joe didn't find it excitin', especially with a dozen boys tearin' by him on race horses that was gettin' a workout. So he took the pony into the infield, and tried to put him over the jumps. He would have discovered that King Spavin wasn't built or trained for steeplechasin' if he'd tried him out on the first hurdle he saw, but instead he steered him over to the water jump, and went at it lickity-split from the wrong side. The pony and him landed in the pool, which bothered Joe a little at first but pleased him later on, because it give him a chance to lick a couple of boys who laughed at him.

When he came back to the barn, all wet and mad, he wanted to lick me. He was insulted because I'd give him his first ride on King Spavin instead of a reg'lar horse. I talked him out of beatin' me up, made him hang up his clothes to dry, wrapped him in a blanket, and sat him in a chair outside the barn.

I had to go inside to do a little vet'inary work on one of the horses, and when I came out, about ten minutes later, Joe was nowheres to be seen. While I was lookin' for him, I heard some muffled cries of distress. Followin' same, I traced them to the back of the barn where I saw the blanket I'd used for wrappin' up the amateur steeplechaser. It was on the ground in a bundle, and was rollin' and pitchin' around in an astonishin' way. Moreover, somebody had wound a good length of rope around it and its contents. It was from this that the cries were comin'. The efforts of the prisoner to escape reminded me of Houdini gettin' out of a straitjacket.

I found the combination of the knots, undid the rope, and opened up the blanket. To my surprise, instead of Joe's black little head poppin' out, the flat features of one of my nigger exercise boys was disclosed.

"How did *you* get in there?" I asked him.

While the kid was tryin' to pump up enough breath to tell me, there came a furious din from the direction of the track. I peeped around the edge of the barn, and nearly fainted! Pasha, the pride of our stable, was tearin' around the track, lathered with sweat, blowin' like a porpoise and pursued by at least fifteen other horses, while to his back clung Joe Carter, naked as the day he was born, beatin' Pasha with a whip and yellin' like a Comanche!

All along the track was stable hands, rail birds, trainers, jocks, and exercise boys, mounted and unmounted, shoutin', wavin' their arms, tryin' to grab Pasha's bridle—doin' all in their power to halt the horse in his wild, heart-breakin' dash, while Joe, lookin' in his bareness like a young he Lady Gondola, was steerin' Pasha out of their way, and varyin' the blows of the whip he was layin' on the horse's flanks with strokes at the friendly hands that was thrust out to intercept him.

I couldn't move; couldn't even think! There was this wild little street Arab ridin' a ten-thousand-dollar horse, accustomed to bein' treated like a baby, until the foam covered the poor animal from the tips of his ears to his hock joints! By the looks of Pasha he'd gone at least three laps before I'd come out to witness the harrowin' sight.

I turned to the little nigger I'd found in the blanket.

"Did you let that blank-blank wild young lunatic take Pasha?" I asked him.

The kid shivered, and his eyes stood out of his head.

"'Ah—Ah couldn' help it, Mist' Sweeneh, Ah tells yo' Ah couldn'!" he gasped. "Dat dere white boy he jus' done haul me daown off'n Pahshah's back. I sez, 'Look heah, white boy, what-all yo'——' "

"To blazes with what you said!" I shouted at him. "You're fired! Get out of here before I slaughter you!"

The kid took my threat at its face value, and beat it, retainin' presence of mind enough, however, to steal the blanket as he fled.

I ran into the barn, grabbed a coil of rope, and hurried to the edge of the track. There I called for volunteers, and stretched the rope across the track, attachin' my assistants to the ends. I ordered them to hang on to that rope no matter what, and we braced ourselves and waited for Pasha to rush down the stretch again.

The horses that had been put into service as pursuers had found the pace too hot, and had either dropped off altogether or were far in the rear; so Pasha dashed down

the track virtu'lly by himself. The crazy, naked young fool who was ridin' him seen what we was about as he neared us, and when he came to the rope, tried to get Pasha to jump over it. Pasha, of course, had never took a hurdle in his life; besides that, he was tired, so our rope caught him just right—under the neck.

Talk about your games of "snap the whip!" There was at least twenty of us hangin' onto that line, but Pasha dragged us two furlongs before we stopped. Joe turned around in the saddle, and started to curse at us for spoilin' his fun. Willin' hands reached up and dragged him off of Pasha. Somebody produced a blanket and threw it over the poor, sweatin', weary animal. A couple of fellers, rightly enraged at the treatment Pasha had got, started to take it out on Joe. He welcomed them with a brace of swings that sent them staggerin' back halfway across the track. They returned to the battle again, reënforced by some four others. Inside of six seconds we was surrounded by a riot! Joe done his best, but he found a mob too much for one naked, undersized kid to handle, and beat it. He could run and dodge almost as good as he could fight, so the gang soon stopped chasin' him.

I'm a long-sufferin', amiable kind of cuss at heart, so, as soon as I found that Pasha was not liable to die, I forgot the idea I had of murderin' Joe and forgave him. I read him a long lecture, though, on the kind of discipline I was accustomed to enforce around my barn, and give him a few hints on the most approved methods of conditionin' horses, layin' great stress on the fact that four-mile workouts at top speed, far from bein' useful for betterin' the racin' form of a horse, would be regarded by any humane trainer as a barbarous method of killin' the animal even. He was so sorry when he'd heard he'd done wrong that he went right out and licked Slim Gerrity's two exercise boys.

He caught onto things pretty quick, once I'd started him on the right track, and it wasn't long before I gave him his first mount. Just to encourage him, I done this in a race we had practically sewed up before it was run, and Joe was the happiest kid in the world when he come through a winner. He didn't exactly arouse any bright mem'ries of Tod Sloan in his prime, but he didn't let the horse throw him either, and I was satisfied he was goin' to make a rider.

He had at least two things in his favor—his nerve and his love of battlin'. No six-inch openin' on the rail was too small for Joe not to try to slip through it. No jam was so tight it made him pull up and give valu'ble track space to some other boy. Older riders might trim him judgin' pace and gettin' a faint-hearted horse to keep on runnin' through the stretch, but there wasn't one of them could approach him in roughin' it. A couple of pretty hardy little jocks, just for the mere joy of annoyin' the newcomer, went out of their way to crowd Joe in his early races. The speed they displayed pullin' their mounts back into the ruck was all that saved them from goin' right over the fence. Also, Joe informed them later that he disapproved of their actions—informed them by means of his good right fist. After that he was always sure of a reasonable wide berth when he rode.

As a scrapper Joe was soon the undisputed king of the jockey quarters. He licked the flat riders, one after the other; then he began on the steeplechasers—the big boys. He had to go out of his way to get into situations with them that required to be arbitrated by fisticuffs, but this wasn't too much trouble to him—so long as the fight came in the end.

I tried to reason with him, tellin' him that fightin' was all well and good in its place, but that his habit of lookin' for trouble was bound to prove disastrous in the end. He just laughed at me.

"When I gets me clouts," he said, "I'll take 'em!"

It wasn't long, of course, before Joe had trouble findin' a fight at the track. Ev'rybody within twenty pounds of his weight was steerin' clear of him, and even the bigger fellers weren't exactly strainin' their eyes lookin' for trouble with him. So there was nothin' left for him to do but work off in the saddle the superfluous energy he used to waste fightin'. His ridin' became better and better. He was winnin' as often as any of them, and the crowds liked the hard, scrappy rides he give a horse. When Joe had the leg up, a feller that put a bet down knew he was goin' to get a run for his money. The newspapers was takin' notice of him, his bank roll was growin' fast, and he was gettin' int'rested in seein' how much he could add to it. He'd bought himself about a dozen suits of swell clothes, enough di'monds to stock a jewelry store and was

actin' like a reg'lar jock—includin' havin' his black hair treated by a barber and his nails trimmed by a manicure.

I had to find fault with him, though, about the way he made a pal of Phil Golden. This Golden was known around the track as "Slippery." The name described him perfect. He was a slim, nifty dressed feller, but he looked crooked and was generally credited with bein' an all around bad egg. They say he used to be a jockey in Australia. Maybe he was, because his way of pronouncin' some words was funny. I'd been told he had cards and the dice completely at his mercy, and that he'd been mixed up in even shadier doin's than just cheatin' the innocent trifler with chance. Anyhow, he wasn't any feller for a kid like Joe, who was comin' along right, to be mixed up with, and I told the boy so.

"Ahr, Phil's all right," Joe said. "Dey knock him a lot, but he's a good, square guy. He's put me in de way o' pickin' up some outside change."

"Gamblin'?" I asked, for Joe's nest egg was gettin' big enough to tempt Phil Golden or any other crook.

"Naw. It's—it's woik—night woik," he said, not lookin' me in the eye.

"Don't you work hard enough down here?" I asked him.

"Ahr, whadda yuh care?" snapped Joe in his tough way.

"I put you in this business. I'm responsible for——"

"Fergit it! I kin take care o' meself—anywheres!" exclaimed Joe with a flip of the hand.

I didn't press the matter. Joe had been lookin' out for himself since he was eleven, and had been doin' pretty good long before I ever heard of him—so why should I worry about him?

Soon, though, his ridin' began fallin' off. There was times when he'd show up at the track lookin' like he'd been drawed through a knot hole. Eyes all sunk, no pep; lookin' ready for bed instead of the saddle.

"Say, kid," I said to him, "you've got all the earmarks of a guy that's hittin' the high spots. Has that crook Golden been learnin' you how to buy a bottle in your turn?"

"Hey, listen," he said. "It ain't none o' yuh business, but I'll tell yuh—jus' tuh keep yuh from bodderin' me—dat I ain't boozin', or nottin' like dat! Is dat good enough fer yuh?"

"No," I said. "It ain't! I'm payin' you good money to ride horses—so are other people—and you ain't doin' it. You don't fight as hard as you used to. You don't seem to have stren'th left when you come to a hard stretch run."

"Ahr!" he growled. "Any time yuh git ready, yuh kin fire me! I don' care; I kin make a livin'!"

Now, this, on top of the headlong way Joe had been goin' after the construction of a bank account, didn't sound right.

"A livin'!" I snorted. "Sure, you can! So can anybody else, but a livin' like you're makin' here——"

"I kin make more dough away from the track that I ever could on it!" he boasted.

"Aha!" I exclaimed. "Then this graft of Golden's——"

"Wouldn' yuh like tuh know about it?" he grinned in an impudent way that made me long to spank him.

"No," I said, "I wouldn't. And I won't ask you again. I'll tell you somethin', though, if you don't pick up in your ridin'!"

"Ahr, go ahead!" he dared me.

Instead of my talk doin' him any good, it seemed to make him worse. He became about the most inconsistent in and outer I ever did see. There was days when he'd ride like a cyclone; at other times Fat Adams, a kid that I let exercise a sellin' horse ev'ry now and then, could have trimmed him without rufflin' a hair.

I never come so near to committin' murder as the day I put the thing up to Golden.

"Golden," I said, "what're you doin' to that boy of mine?"

"Boy?" he repeated with his peculiar accent, raisin' his eyebrows.

"Aw, don't stall with me, Golden!" I blustered.

"But, aold chawp, Ai daon't understawnd you!" he insisted.

"What're you doin' with Joe Carter?" I asked, holdin' my temper in as much as I could.

"Aoh, Jaoe?" he said. "Not a thing!"

"He tells me you got him workin' nights," I said.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed. "Wairking, is it? He taold you he was wairking? Ha, ha!"

"I'll flatten that hooked nose of yours—if you laugh at me!" I threatened.

"Aoh, naow," he said, real pleasantlike. "Yaou'd dao that, waould yaou? Yaou m'y gao to blyzes!"

And he walked away from me without another word.

I sounded some fellers who was accustomed to knockin' around the city nights without learnin' that Joe and Golden was ever seen together in the white light district; neither did I hear of them hauntin' any of the gamblin' clubs that Golden usu'lly patronized. Whatever they were doin' was somethin' that was bein' put through well under cover.

Meanwhile Joe continued showin' up at the track lookin' all bunged up and tired to death. He'd be that way a couple of days a week anyhow; then he'd rest up, get back into shape and ride like a whirlwind—only to appear again lookin' like a ghost and about as ready for a hard day in the saddle as I was—and I was tippin' the beam at one-eighty and gettin' fatter by the day.

Tom Harrison spoke to me about Joe's erratic ridin' one afternoon when I met him on the train. Tom was a bookmaker, but a fine feller.

"He's got me guessin'," said Tom. "It used to be, when Joe had a mount that looked like he had a chance, that a feller could depend on the boy givin' the best he had in him to win. But now—he's thrown me down a dozen times! I'd rather see the greenest stableboy on a horse I liked than Joe Carter. What's the matter with the boy?"

"It's Golden," I said. "He's got Joe under his thumb, and whatever he has the kid doin' nights——"

"Why don't you put a stop to it?"

"How can I?"

"Say, listen," said Tom. "I'm strong for old-fashioned methods. Joe Carter's a successful jockey, but he's only a kid—and kids are the same now as they were when we were boys. My old man raised ten of us, and he used us all the same. When he wanted us to do somethin', he talked to us; if we didn't do it, he just whaled the life out of us. And let me tell you it *worked!*"

"I can't beat Joe," I objected.

"Why not?" asked Tom.

"He's not a child," I said. "Besides he's such a scrapper that——"

"That's just what's the matter with him! He's licked ev'ry boy at the track—and the Lord knows how many outside of it. He's so swelled up about his rep as a fighter that he thinks he's got the whole world buffaloed. Now, if some boy about his own size was to give him a good beatin', it might take some of the swellin' out of his head. He needs—— Say!" he exclaimed, as though struck suddenly by an idea. "I just thought of somethin'! Do you ever go to the fight clubs in New York?"

"Never," I said.

"Well," Tom told me, talkin' most enthusiastic, "there's a little shrimp boxin' now—about Joe's size, I'd say, or smaller. He's called the Australian Wonder. A little, blond, innocent-lookin' kid, but wow! what a scrapper! I seen him once. He finished a boy thirty pounds heavier than him in a punch. They tell me he fights three and four times a night sometimes, jumpin' from club to club in a cab. If you could steer Joe up against him——"

"How?" I asked. "I can't ask Joe to go into the ring with him."

"Maybe not," Tom agreed. "But you could do it more natural than that. You could *hire* the Wonder to come down to the track, and pick a fight with Joe. He'd do the rest!"

"Oh, say!" I exclaimed. "That's too much like hirin' a gunman to——"

"It's for a good cause, ain't it? Don't that make it all right? Don't be too soft-hearted about it, Jerry. A lickin' like the Australian Wonder would hand Joe would do the kid more good than anything else in the world. Now, listen!" he said sharply, when I tried to object. "The Australian Wonder is boxin' to-night at the Select A. C. in West Twenty-seventh Street. Come down with me, and see him kill a guy. Then we can collar him after the fight and make terms with him. He'll do it all right. He likes to fight so much I wouldn't be surprised if he'd do it for nothin'."

I couldn't help thinkin' it was an underhanded trick to play on Joe, and I told Tom so. He talked like a lawyer tryin' to convince me the plan was all right, but the best I'd do was to agree to go with him to the boxin' show and look the Australian Wonder over.

The boxin' club he led me to was an awful dump. We had to fight our way into it through the roughest mob I ever rubbed elbows with, and I say that after a lifetime's experience with the assorted rabble that assembles at the track.

The ring was set in the middle of what was once a small theyater. The place was so thick with tobacco smoke I wondered how

the birds up in the top of the gallery could see anything. I wasn't over companionable with Tom, but he just laughed at me.

After we'd sat there inhalin' poison gas for a half hour or so, a fat bird in his shirt sleeves identified two little kids who'd climbed into the ring, a bell sounded, and the youngsters whaled away at each other for four rounds. Tom got real excited, but the combat didn't give me a thrill.

There were three more battles between boys of various sizes, and the only effect they had on me was to make me more anxious to grab the train for home.

Tom realized I wasn't enjoyin' myself.

"Be game, Jerry," he grinned. "The next fight's the one. Wait till you see the Australian Wonder!"

"I'd rather see a nice, soft bed," I told him, yawnin'.

The Australian Wonder's opponent was named by the announcer as Joe Mahoney—prob'ly English for Giovanni Macaroni—for he was a husky Eyetalian, at least twenty pounds heavier than the Wonder, with a broad, hairy chest, thick arms, and as hard a face as I ever looked at.

The Wonder, as Tom had told me, was about Joe's size; a frail-lookin' youngster, who wore his long golden hair parted in the middle and looked like he'd just stepped out of a velvet suit. Judged by fightin' standards, he looked about as dangerous as a squirrel. He was wiry enough, but, with that Little Lord Folderol hair, to tell anybody he was a bruiser!

"Say!" I exclaimed to Tom. "The wop will kill blondie! Look at the difference in their sizes."

"I'll bet you anything up to five hundred that the Wonder knocks him out," replied Tom.

"I believe you," I said. "Any time you offer even money the bet's worth five to one."

As I spoke I happened to glance out to the aisle, and saw a feller in a gray suit walkin' to a seat. It was Golden.

"It's all off," I said.

"What is?"

"This gag of havin' the Australian Murderer——"

"Wonder," Tom corrected me.

"Wonder beat Joe up."

"Why?" asked Tom.

"There's Golden," I said. "Joe must know the Wonder."

"Joe never goes to the fights," said Tom.

"But Golden does," I said. "He'll tip Joe off."

"Aw, you make me sick!" growled Tom. "Golden needn't know anything about it. You can have the trick turned some mornin' before Golden's even out of bed."

While we were talkin' the gloves were adjusted on the boys, they got their instructions from the referee, and had returned to their corners.

Then the bell rang. The blond-haired kid leaped out of his corner, upsettin' his stool into the lap of a feller in a ringside seat. He was in the center of the ring in one bound, and began pepperin' Mahoney with rights and lefts that rattled on the Eyetalian's head and body like the roll of a drum. Mahoney gave ground with graceful movements—like a man fallin' downstairs backwards. Blondie followed him right up to the ropes, where Mahoney ducked down, coverin' his face and body as well as he could with his gloves and arms.

Blondie just reached around behind Mahoney, and began tappin' him on the back over the waist line. Mahoney straightened up, and dropped his gloves from his face; at which Blondie suddenly switched his attack to the more vulnerable spots that was left open in consequence.

"By golly!" I said to Tom. "That kid *can* fight! He goes at a feller just like Joe would."

"He'd kill Joe!" declared Tom.

He did remind me of Joe. He had the same slim figger, made up entirely of steel springs, and the same vicious way of landin' a punch—as though he got all the joy in the world out of feelin' the shock of his fist crashin' into somebody's jaw. Except for the blond hair, you could have took this Australian Wonder and Joe for twins.

Mahoney hadn't struck a blow. He was kept entirely too busy trying to dodge, duck, and block the Wonder's rainstorm of punches, and he was succeedin' about as well as if he'd been tied to a post. Blondie was drivin' him all over the ring. One of the big boy's eyes was closed, blood was comin' from his nose, and his lips had been flattened up against his teeth. His body was as red from the beatin' he was gettin' as though he'd just stepped out of a tub of boilin' water.

The crowd was wild; cheerin', clappin'

their hands, poundin' their feet. I was gettin' excited myself, and was standin' up, unconsciously makin' swings in time with the Wonder's, and whisperin' instructions to him.

I could see Golden standin' on his chair, yellin' and makin' motions with his hands. Bein' from Australia himself, I figgered, he prob'ly knew the kid. The thought made me laugh. If this Australian Wonder, a friend of Golden's perhaps, should beat some sense into Joe Carter's head, make him attend to business—and give up Golden!

All over the hall people was beggin' the Wonder to finish Mahoney. The uproar was terrific. Tom Harrison was slappin' me on the back and screechin' like a fool.

"How about that kid?" he yelled in my ear. "Do you think he could show Joe Carter a few things?"

A heavyweight would have gone down under the blows that the Wonder hung on that guinea's jaw, but Mahoney somehow managed to keep on his feet. You could see from the way his head was rockin' and his eyes rollin' that his mind had long since wandered from his job—but an ingrained gameness and stubbornness refused to let his wabbly knees give way and cause him to fall to the mat.

The Wonder started puttin' his punches into Mahoney's stomach. Bang! Bang! Bang! the gloves thudded against the wop's cellar. The blows bent him over and straightened him up like a monkey on a stick. His arms were waggin' around like the broken wings of a windmill. They seemed to be searchin' for somethin' to hang on to, and the Wonder was dodgin' back from them as they threatened to close around his neck.

Suddenly the Wonder stepped back a pace, set himself, took careful aim, and let go a punch for the jaw that would have pulverized the door of a bank vault. A chorus of groans echoed through the hall as the Wonder's glove slammed against Mahoney's jaw.

Mahoney reeled around for a second, as though undecided which way to fall; then he pitched forward, and as he fell, his arms wound themselves around the Wonder's neck. The blond fighter tried to break loose, but Mahoney's arms locked tight, and the little Australian had all he could do to keep his footin' as the heavier scrapper bore down on him.

Mahoney was out; there was no doubt of that. He'd been pounded into insensibility as sure as any gladiator of the ring ever was, but he was still on his feet, propped up unwillin'ly by the man who'd knocked him out.

For all their excitement, the crowd laughed. It was a funny situation at that —one fighter handin' the finish punch to another, and then preventin' him from executin' the final Kellermann to the floor!

Golden jumped down from his chair, and dashed down the aisle. He reached over the row of ringside seats, and began to pound on the floor of the ring with his fist.

"Ai s'y!" he hollered at the Wonder. "Get aout from undah! Get aout from undah, Ai s'y!"

The Wonder saw him, and redoubled his efforts to wriggle lose.

"Golden's all excited," I yelled at Tom Harrison.

"Yes," he answered, "the Wonder's a great fav'rite of his; he follows him all over town to see him fight."

Golden began poundin' on the floor again.

"Ai s'y!" he shouted to the referee. "Paht them, cawn't yaou! Myke that fellaow let gao!"

"Gwan, you! Sit down!" barked the man over whose neck Golden had been reachin'.

" 'Elp the Wondah loose, cawn't yaou!" Golden shouted to the referee again. " 'E cawn't sta'y 'ere all night, yaou knaow; 'e's got another fight on!"

The referee, who was a beefy, stupid-lookin' guy, seemed to be doin' about all he could to tear the boys apart. He had his arms between their bodies, and was haulin' away at them like a butcher would go at a side of beef. But he couldn't break that drownin' man's grip of Mahoney's any more than he could have tore an anchor chain apart.

At last he got impatient, and shifted his hands to the kids' faces. He shoved and shoved, his fat face growin' purple from his exertions, but nothin' stirred—except that the Wonder got mad and used some mighty choice language urgin' the third man in the ring to quit pushin' his nose in.

"I guess the Wonder will have to hold that guy up till he comes to," I told Tom. "Unless," I added, "he wants to fall over and lay down with him."

Then all at once Mahoney's head bobbed

to one side, and one of his arms slipped from the Wonder's neck. He fell sideways to the floor, limp as a bundle of loose rags. The fat referee, who had been puttin' all his weight into his efforts to separate the fighters, lost his balance when the resistance was taken away from him and fell on top of Mahoney. Also, he carried the Wonder down with him.

"The referee wins in a walk!" I shouted to Tom, thinkin' of his two-hundred-odd pounds on top of those two kids.

Sprawled out on his stomach, the referee was goin' through all the motions of the breast stroke in swimmin' as he tried to find a purchase for his hands and feet on the slippery canvas floor. He was realizin' into what kind of an undignified position he had fallen, and was ready to try anything to regain his feet. Nothin' was sacred to his grasp. One hand closed about the shoulder of Mahoney; with the other he reached under him and seized the Wonder's blond hair. Then he gave a mighty heave, doubled his legs under him, and got to his feet. As he did, above all the roarin' laughter of the crowd, I heard two cries. One came from the Wonder; the other from Golden, who was still at the ringside.

And well they might have cried, for, in the referee's left hand, as he staggered back across the ring, was a blond wig, which he'd snatched from the Wonder's head!

The Australian Wonder was Joe Carter!

It took me a second or two to realize that fact. Things were happenin' abs'lutely too fast for me. So this was the secret of Joe's friendship for Golden, and his mysterious "night work!" Unable to get all the fightin' his nature craved by legitimate means, he was goin' out in masquerade, beatin' up three or four pros a night! No wonder he'd been appearin' at the track lookin' like a candidate for a sanitarium! And what a scrapper he must be at that—battlin' with a wig on, knockin' 'em out one after the other without even havin' his disguise disturbed!

When Joe saw the referee backin' away, he squirmed to his feet and made a ten-foot leap for the wig. Golden was almost as quick about hoppin' over the ropes and divin' for it, too. The two of them got hold of Joe's disguise together. Bein' excited, they started to battle for possession of it, pullin' and haulin' until the two sides of the wig separated where the part was. As the wig gave way Joe and Golden fell flat to the floor.

About the only feller in the hall who wasn't stunned stupid by the queer succession of occurrences was Mahoney. He'd got his beforehand. He lay there still as a dead goat. He'd been on the floor for at least thirty seconds, but the referee hadn't counted him out yet. That fat boob was too much worried about the sudden appearance of a black-haired fighter where a blond one had been before to do anything else but rub his paunch and stare.

The guys who'd paid their money to see a fight couldn't dope things at all. The low comedy doin's—especially the matter of the wanderin' wig—soon lost all humor for them. They felt there was somethin' queer—and when a gatherin' of fight fans believes somethin' out of the way is bein' worked on them what do they do?

That's right—and they did it! Chairs, pop bottles, cigar butts, hats, and other movable articles that was readily converted into missiles began to fill the air. The rougher element, who were occupyin' the less-expensive seats in the back and in the gallery, began to move forward, growlin' ominously.

I turned to Tom.

"Will you stick?" I asked him.

"You know me," he told me, pickin' up a chair, and beginnin' to swing it.

We fought our way to the ringside, leavin' our wake strewed with victims. We climbed over the ropes, cuttin' a swath through the gatherin' multitudes that was swarmin' into the ring. Our play, of course, was to save Joe from rough handlin'. I found the boy, and handed him a pop bottle.

"Do your duty, son!" I ordered, and me and him and Tom started through the crowd toward a back door. As we began our journey, I spied a feller in a gray suit bound in the same direction. It was Golden. He wasn't fightin' his way out, though. He was slippin' through by virtue of much twistin' of the body and copious beggin' of pardons.

The flyin' wedge that Tom and me and the former Australian Wonder constituted was a hummer! It was not to be stopped! All of us suffered injuries of various degrees of graveness, but we finally made the door that was our objective, slammed it on our pursuers, locked it, and beat it down

a windin' flight of wooden stairs to the street. Joe grabbed a bathrobe from somewhere in his flight. It fitted him like a circus tent would, but it covered the nakedness of his ring costume.

As we reached the street, we could hear the door we'd closed givin' way before the shoulders of the mob. We waited for no more, but shot down towards Seventh Avenue with the speed of a quarter horse. Kind fortune came to our aid in the form of a night-hawk hansom as we rounded the corner. Into it we piled, biddin' the driver whip up his steed and carry us where he willed—just so long as it was out of that neighborhood. I pulled off Joe's boxin' gloves, and heaved them out into the night.

Our dash for safety ended at Tom Harrison's hotel. In Tom's room I broke one of my rules and accepted a stiff shot of whisky. I figgered I needed it—and had earned it. Then I addressed Joe.

"Joe," I said, "*why* did you do it?"

"Ahr!" he grunted, not quite so cocky as usu'lly, though. "Jus' fer de fightin'. I wasn' gittin' no action at de track no more—besides, Golden said he'd make me champeen of de woild!"

"Kind of a masked marvel?" I suggested, sarcastic.

"No," he said, "after I'd got a rep, we was goin' tuh can de wig an' have me fight as Joe Carter, de battlin' jock. Golden said de wig would give me good advertisin'."

"It did," I said dryly. "I guess when we get the mornin' papers we'll find that the Australian Wonder's about the most notorious fighter in New York. Son," I said, puttin' my hand on his shoulder, "one game at a time. Which do you want—the ring or the track?"

He looked at me, but didn't speak.

"To-night proved who's your friend," I suggested. "Golden beat it as soon as the trouble started. *We* stuck!" I said, pointin' to Tom.

Joe's eyes blazed.

"Golden blew, did he?" he barked. "Run out on me, eh? He done dat?"

I nodded.

"De doity, yaller pup!" blazed Joe. "He ducked when dere was fightin' to do!"

"You done pretty good at the track," I said, anxious to get some fine work in while the kid was at fever heat. "Your ring career wasn't so successful—by a damn sight!"

He sat there thinkin' for a few minutes. Then:

"I guess yuh're right," he said. "Ahr, I'll stick to de horses!" he decided. "You've used me right," he told me, "besides," he added, his eyes brightenin', "I kin make enough dough ridin' to hire a sparrin' partner—if I need one!"

Tom pulled my sleeve.

"Have another drink," he said. Then he whispered in my ear: "I told you the Australian Wonder was the boy to fix Joe up!"

"I won't dispute it, Tom!" I told him.

Are you following up Brown's stories? They appear only in POPULAR.

RUNNING A NEEDLESS RISK

FRED T. DUBOIS, the first man elected to the United States Senate from Idaho, makes his home now in Washington the greater part of each year.

Representative J. Hampton Moore of Philadelphia is a big gun on the house committee on ways and means and at times a powerful scolder of the Democrats because, he says, they tax too heavily all kinds of business; and, despite the senator's Democracy, is a good friend of Dubois.

The ex-senator, when the eight-billion-dollar revenue bill was being written, introduced an old Idaho acquaintance to Moore. They were chatting pleasantly on various subjects when Moore complimented Dubois on always looking young and also on having as his friends men who had retained their youth.

"There's a reason for that," said the Idaho visitor; "it's the air out there, the most healthful, restorative, excellent air in this country."

"You'd better not say that in Washington," cautioned Moore. "The Democrats will put it on the drug schedule and tax it out of existence."

Breath of the Devil

By Howard Fielding

Author of "Plot of Number Eleven," "Bill Harris," Etc.

After the war was over we heard of Lewisite, a gas so powerful that if twenty airplanes dropped a comparatively small quantity of it upon the city of Berlin, the whole population would have been wiped out. Mr. Fielding tells us of something quite as terrible, neo-eserine, a poison nicknamed "the breath of the devil." But this horrible drug is subsidiary in noxiousness to the man who uses it in this powerful story of angelic goodness and diabolic evil.

(A Two-Part Story—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

THE CHEERFUL STRANGER.

PURE chance gave me a glimpse of a certain man, at a time when I didn't know him, nor want him, nor expect ever to see him again. A little later, I still didn't know him nor expect to see him, but I wanted him extremely—"most particularly," as a friend of mine from Scotland Yard used to say.

My accidental view of the stranger came about in a way otherwise unrelated to the present narrative. The intelligence office had received a tip that a missing witness in an important case might be picked up, almost any evening, in a pretentious and busy barroom on upper Broadway not very far from where I live. I put two men on the place, and about nine o'clock I strolled over to see how they were getting along.

By their account the tip was probably good, and at any moment we might get action; so I stepped inside and bought a bad cigar for twice the proper price of a good one, at the tobacco counter near the Broadway entrance. In fact, the expected person never came, but he whom I neither looked for nor desired was prompt, as if to an appointment. While I was lighting that cigar the swinging doors, on which I kept a corner of my eye, were opened, an emaciated hand being thrust in between them, and then the stranger entered, not without a kind of dignity, and passed me toward the bar.

He was dressed like a seafaring man, though not in the uniform of any service; rough clothes that had seen hard usage, but their wearer had seen worse. A very ordinary man, I should have guessed, with nothing salient in his natural appearance—if anybody might venture to imagine what that would have been. His present aspect could hardly be called personal; one felt that any man would look like that who had been melted in the same fire of affliction and cast in the same mold of tragedy. My own thought was, what happened to this fellow? He might have been taken yesterday from a desert island where he had lived a year on raw shellfish and seaweed. Moreover, he seemed far gone with consumption. An unhealthy flush was on his cheek bones that were knobs on which the skin of his face hung like a shirt on a handspike. He wore a short, scanty, ragged beard, and this and the tangled hair sticking out under his cap at the sides and back had a grayish hue in the electric light, though the man was not much beyond forty, I should have said. Racially, he belonged to the lighter tribes of men, and might pass for an American.

What impressed me very forcibly was a kind of wild cheerfulness that radiated from this ruin, an unquenchable zest. High spirits are not uncommon with victims of the

malady from which he seemed to be dying, but I had never seen so notable a manifestation. The brightness of his eyes was not all fever; it indicated a greedy interest in the future—of which he had about two months as the extreme of rational expectation, I should suppose.

To me he was no more than the subject of casual interest, of curiosity without purpose; I can't say of sympathy, though his condition seemed to call for something of that sort. No impulse to befriend him entered my mind, but far more remote was the idea of active antagonism, the notion that I should ever try to make myself an obstacle to this unfortunate whom fate had failed to daunt.

He was compelled to wait unduly for his dram while the bartender served more-prosperous-looking men out of their turn; but the stranger, though he held a coin ready in his hand, showed no ill-tempered impatience. He enjoyed the interval; he was having a fine time all by himself, despite the weakness which constrained him to clutch the railing for support of the mere skeleton under his poor clothes. I noticed a rudely mended hole in his coat, below the right shoulder blade, and the garment seemed to have been washed around this spot, but a dull stain was still visible. Blood? I wondered whether the wretch had suffered an injury to cap the climax of his misfortunes.

When at last the bottle was set before him I expected to see him fill his glass eagerly, in rude sailor fashion, but instead he poured out a moderate amount steadily, as if measuring the dose with an apothecary's habitual exactitude. Used to taking medicine, I thought, and little enough good it has done him.

Certainly no benefit could be derived from this potation, but at least he enjoyed it, though not in the way of a drunkard. He drank a glass of water afterward, and relished that just as much. And he even took pleasure in paying for his entertainment; he spun a half dollar on the bar with such unusual dexterity as to engage the admiration of the barkeeper, who remarked:

"Say, you must be pretty strong in the fingers."

The stranger's sunken cheeks were creased with a smile, due to gratified vanity in his trivial accomplishment. He closed his right eye knowingly, repeated with his empty hand the peculiar twirling movement, and said in a husky voice:

"It's all in the method."

Then, having received his change, he walked away, somewhat feebly, but with perfect satisfaction written all over him.

What hope, what purpose, what inward spring of happiness, I asked myself, sustains this stricken creature in the valley of the shadow? Pollyanna creeds of cheerfulness may sail the high seas, for all I know, and piratically scuttle the natural courage and sincerity of poor Jack; but I should rather have guessed that this fellow was not lying to himself; that he had heard —on his deathbed, as it were—glad tidings of personal advantage, or perhaps of disaster to an enemy; his joy somehow savored of the diabolical, and chilled rather than warmed the heart of the beholder.

I was sufficiently interested to watch him, over the top of the swinging doors, as he halted at the curb, waiting to cross Broadway westward. I saw him turn his head suddenly, as if startled, and raise his right hand in a sort of salute, checked before completion. Some one had spoken to him, and as the doors were thrust open at this moment I had a clear view. The person who had addressed the cheerful sailor was a neighbor of mine, but not an acquaintance—Edmund Werner by name, a tall, blond young man, very good looking. He and his pretty wife lived in a house of their own on West End Avenue and Werner had probably just come from home.

The conversation between the two men, if pictured on the screen without words, might seem to be no more than "Good evening" on the part of each. Then the sailor set his thin legs in motion and Werner watched him till he reached the other side in safety.

Another interesting question had been added to the list of things I didn't know about this wreck of the seven seas; by what chance was he acquainted with my prosperous neighbor, a man so differently situated, so wholesomely rooted in the earth upon whose fringe the stranger was mere driftwood? Yet the stranger, as I knew even by the distant view of his back, was still as heartily content as when he took his dram and spun his coin, pleased to display a useless bit of skill though death was fronting him in the shape of his own

ghastly image in the mirror beyond the bar. But the face of my robust and well-fed neighbor was clouded with anxiety as he turned to go his way.

The time of this incident was May, 1918.

CHAPTER II.

MR. HOLBACH SEES WHAT HE WANTS.

At that time I knew little about the affairs of Edmund Werner, not even his occupation. To me he was only the husband of the beautiful young woman who lived in a certain house. Even his name had come to me at random without context.

I used to hope, whenever I passed by, that Mrs. Werner would be visible at a window or sitting in her car at the curb. To make her acquaintance was not within the scope of my dreams, and the same would have been true had she been single; for I was not in her sphere, having lost all my money. A much humbler romance would have beckoned to me in vain. But the mere fact that in this instance it was the lady who had attracted my attention prevented me from asking any questions, and even drew me aside from those natural currents of information which a detective with a vocation intercepts instinctively.

Oddly enough, it was on the cards—and indeed on one already poised in Destiny's fingers—that I should pry very deeply into my neighbors' affairs. To-day there is nothing material which is unknown to me, in a story that goes back some years, and leads through strange ways to a peculiar development of tragedy.

The Holbach-Werner Company, drugs and chemicals, is the modern successor of a partnership formed in New York by two German chemists in 1879. The original Holbach of this firm died long ago, leaving his interest to a nephew, Karl Holbach, then a minor. The original Werner survived till June, 1914, and then departed suddenly. Perhaps an angel warned him of what was coming, and hinted that it was high time for an honest, kindly, truthful man to quit this world—especially a German. He had already retired from the active management of the business, which had been incorporated with Edmund Werner, the old chemist's son, as president.

Karl Holbach had been in debt to the firm for advances which had saved him from a not-too-savory mess of debts. This obligation was wiped out, and he received one-fourth of the new company's shares. Edmund Werner got a somewhat larger portion, and his father the balance, which—with some restrictions—passed at his death to his widow, a comely person younger than her stepson. She had served as a stenographer in the old firm's offices till she married the head of the establishment, two years before he died. He was a handsome, sturdy old fellow, and even at that epoch not impossible as a figure of romance.

Veteran chemists always refer with great respect to "old man Werner," even now when they say such things softly behind their hands because he was a German. He did some fine research work, and was an authority in certain branches of synthetic chemistry. But all serious experimenters fail a hundred times to once that they succeed; and there is nothing unusual in the fact that the last effort of old man Werner came to naught, as far as he ever knew.

Details are unnecessary; what he attempted was to make a useful therapeutic agent by modification of eserine, an extremely poisonous alkaloid obtained from the Calabar bean, and of little value in medicine. Eventually he tried to make synthetic eserine; that is, to build the alkaloid from dead matter instead of extracting it from a source in the vegetable kingdom. He failed in this, after long labors, but he did succeed in making a kindred substance hitherto unknown, a poison incomparably more violent than eserine, and apparently of no use whatever. He called it neo-eserine for scientific purposes, and nicknamed it in his native language *Teufelsatem*—Breath of the Devil.

It is a white crystalline solid, sparingly soluble in water but readily in alcohol; and possessed of such peculiar properties that it seems to vaporize with great readiness from the solid state, at all ordinary temperatures. The explanation is that as soon as the crystals are free of the solvent, they become covered with a microscopic film which is really neo-esserine in liquid form; and this is very volatile—and murderous beyond belief.

"One bubble of that vapor at the end of a whale's nose will kill him instantly, to the tip of his tail," old man Werner expressed it. "He'll never know which end of him dies first."

The wonder is that it didn't kill its dis-

coverer the first time he ever got it pure, and apparently dry, in which condition it is at its worst. If he foresaw the danger, he must have been indeed a remarkable chemist; but at least he had a long habit of caution, deadly drugs of many kinds having been his daily companions since his youth. At any rate Devil's Breath did not blight him; he detected it in time; and he toyed with it for several months without mishap. He reached no important results, never published any report, and did not speak of his discovery to other chemists except his son and Holbach, neither of whom was interested.

When the old man died all that remained of these experiments was about ten grams of neo-eserine sealed in a tube, some bits of special apparatus, and a notebook containing the record. Edmund found these locked in a metal box appropriately labeled. Holbach was present in the laboratory, and the two men exchanged a few words on the subject. Then Edmund put the box away in a safe place, and forgot its existence. Holbach gave the matter no thought at that time; he had something else on his mind.

This gentleman was in love for the first time, it may fairly be said, though he had been a ruthless pursuer and forsaker of women for a dozen years. He was now past thirty—one of those healthy-looking, well-built but somewhat beefy Germans whose ruddy skin is tight over their round cheeks, and whose coats, no matter what tailor makes them, seem crammed with shoulders. He had no experience of long sieges in the warfare of sex, but this was mere chance; if the unattainable and desired woman had come in his way, he might have been pursuing her from the beginning. The conviction was ingrained in him that he had a natural right to whatever he wanted, provided that he wanted it badly enough. In such cases he was capable of steady, accurate thinking, infinite patience, and profound dissimulation.

He lived with the Werners in the house on West End Avenue, where he had fitted up a bachelor suite. He had others, off and on, but this was his home. The next-door neighbor was a Mrs. Bayne, a widow with plenty of money, whose loneliness was relieved by visits of innumerable cousins from all parts of the world. Late in May of 1914 there came to her house two cousins from abroad, a father and daughter. The father was an American named Kenyon who had married a Belgian girl some twenty years ago, and thus had come into the ownership of a business in Ghent, where he had ever since resided. He had crossed the ocean, now and then, but had never before brought a member of his family.

The girl, Alma, was a strikingly beautiful creature, lithe and graceful, with hair of a strange red like the warmest tints in old rosewood, and very dark blue eyes, various in their aspect, sometimes veiled and dreamy, then opening on the least provocation alert like flowers of wonderland. I did not see her in this day of her girlhood, but some three years later, when, so they told me, she had changed less than is usual. So I may be accepted as a competent witness; and I testify that she filled me with astonishment. For some while thereafter I was aware of a change in my ideas of beauty, a delicate readjustment similar to that which takes place more grossly when one has been set right in a basic opinion through some vivid mental experience, and finds all his thinking necessarily lifted to a higher plane.

What Holbach saw I don't know; we are of different races. But it is certain that as soon as he set eyes on Alma he marked her for his own. She was barely seventeen, little more than half his age, but that affected Holbach as much as a word of reproof would restrain a boa constrictor. He knew that he must wait, and that for a long time he must hold himself under the strict orders of prudence, but the girl was his property, just the same, in his secret thoughts.

Alma was wholly unaware of this appropriation. Despite her youth and somewhat cloistered rearing, she had seen men behave foolishly on her account, wherefore she was the less likely to suspect one who didn't. She approved of her cousin's neighbors; found the two young gentlemen agreeable, the old gentleman very distinguished, and his wife's manners not nearly so queer as Mrs. Bayne thought they were. The house next door, by Mrs. Bayne's report, would be the chief center of gayety, and this may have helped to throw a rose tint over its inhabitants. Alma's visit to America was her most splendid holiday. On with the dance, was her present motto.

She hoped that her father would get

along well with Mr. Holbach, whom he had never met before—the Werners having moved into that neighborhood since Mr. Kenyon's last visit to America—but Alma feared unpleasantness because Mr. Holbach looked a little like the type of German that her father hated. Still, there are so many different kinds; perhaps he was one of the others. He was indeed, as soon as he perceived the necessity, which was right away. It is only for lack of method that the Ethiopian cannot change his skin or the leopard his spots. It's all in knowing how.

The transformation took place on the first occasion for man-talk, and Edmund Werner listened with surprise and embarrassment while Holbach quietly assented to Kenyon's assault on Potsdam and kultur, and even added some very acute observations in the same line. Here was a conversion of which Edmund had never seen the slightest hopeful sign, in a thousand arguments with Holbach on this subject. It savored of the miraculous. He thought at first that Holbach was "stringing" the Belgian; but no; Holbach meant to be taken seriously, and he succeeded. Next day Kenyon spoke to his daughter of Holbach's "sterling Americanism," adding:

"He hates Potsdam almost as much as I do, and understands it almost as well."

Alma was delighted to hear it. Now let joy be unconfined.

It is probable that in these first days of strong emotion, while the wonder was still on him, Holbach showed to better advantage than at any other time of his life. A man with less inherent idea of discipline, with less of method to control his feelings and to guide his conduct, might have made a fool of himself in minor ways, but fatally. Not so Holbach; he consulted his judgment earnestly when he was alone, and obeyed it with exactitude when in Alma's presence. He was a student, a product of home training, special, scientific; he had not the American fault of tackling a subject haphazard wherever the book may chance to open; he knew how to begin at the beginning. Selfish as a tomcat, he excelled that animal in patience, and had a reasoning faculty besides. He knew that he must please Alma and not himself, and he solved the difference in their ages and experience as if it had been a problem in chemistry.

He expected nothing in the line of sentimental conquest. Many young girls are infinitely foolish, but Alma was not of that kind, and he was not playing the game that way. He preferred to think of it as long and difficult. During Alma's stay in America he would make himself agreeable, and try to gain the beginning of an influence over her mind, and over her father's. There was no previous attachment nor matrimonial prospect in the way, as he learned easily enough through Mrs. Bayne.

In the fall he would have a long vacation and go to Belgium, where he would take such action as the situation might warrant at that time—probably nothing definite, but he would go again. The ocean was not wide enough to part him from what he wanted. A few days had sufficed to fix in him a desire and a deep determination such as few men would be capable of, even under long-continued incitement. Undoubtedly he had the type of mind susceptible of a fixed idea; and in the love of such a man there is always the germ of such a tragedy as came to its distorted and poisonous maturity in this affair.

Except for a single weakness in his position, Holbach would have hidden his sentiments with complete success. He couldn't prevent Kenyon from talking about Germany, nor exclude Edmund from these conversations. Kenyon prided himself on having no prejudice against Americans of German descent; in fact, if their opinions were sound he had a special affection for them such as an evangelist might feel for new converts peculiarly useful in spreading the true faith. Holbach had never been a propagandist; his own welfare was the chief of his concerns; but Edmund knew his real views and would never accept the surface alteration as due to mere politeness and desire to avoid controversy. There must be a reason for this singular apostasy.

Holbach detected the suspicion, and met it with a carefully tempered disclosure, in strict confidence, endeavoring to raise a question of honor in Edmund's mind, on the chance that he, too, had been allured. He had; but with the gentleness, the reserve and delicacy appropriate to his wholly different nature. There was no need to mention it. He spoke loyally to Holbach, going no further with good advice than to remind him of Alma's youth, and of her speedy return to her native land.

All the advice possible to the tongues of men would not have affected Holbach, unless it gave a hint for the furtherance of his own design. He had got what he was after in this interview; he had shown himself first in the field, and had put Edmund under a binding obligation. A similar one wouldn't have bound himself, but that didn't matter. Edmund would now be careful, in discussions of *Weltpolitik* with Kenyon, not to say anything that would show the fallacious character of those lifelong convictions which Holbach had extemporized. As for Edmund, he was aware for some days of an internal bruise that ached more than he would have expected; and then nature, by way of cure, applied a counter-irritant in the form of the sudden illness and death of his father.

A pleasant, manly fellow, especially if he happens to be very handsome, is a sympathetic figure in bereavement; and Alma was a tender-hearted girl. For a fortnight or more Holbach endured the pangs of Tophet, seeing her so kind to Edmund. But the wheel of fate turned rapidly and brought new issues.

Kenyon had meant to stay in America about a month, but he encountered strange delays in business, not affecting the affairs which were strictly his own, but other interests of much greater magnitude which he had undertaken to represent. These brought him into contact with certain individuals of vast wealth, who, for some mysterious reason, seemed to have lost their habits of brusque decision. Kenyon's proposals were neither rejected nor dismissed, but merely postponed. He heard indefinite words about unsettled conditions in Europe, and the quarrel between Austria and Serbia, but no plain predictions were made, and Kenyon was himself an optimist, believing that Germany knew more than she was credited with knowing, and was secretly afraid of the strength arrayed against her.

But on the evening of the seventh of July Kenyon called by appointment on a large, agreeable gentleman at his temporary quarters in a hotel, and found him far gone with drink as the result of a conference which had extended over both luncheon and dinner in uninterrupted session. Kenyon took care of him for several hours, and was rewarded with some intimate disclosures.

The Belgian went out into the night aghast. He turned his face eastward, and seemed to see in the sky a flaring comet of disaster to which the multitude was blind.

A few days later, while engaged in hurried preparations for departure, he fell seriously ill. When he was up again, Europe was afire.

He had no illusions as to the fate of Belgium or of his own property there. The escape of his wife and young son was as much as he dared ask of Heaven. Such cable correspondence as he was able to have with Mrs. Kenyon seemed to show that she was thoroughly awake to the situation, but was confused by the imperfect form in which his instructions reached her. As soon as possible he sailed, leaving Alma behind greatly against her wish.

She received word of her father's arrival in England, but the rest was silence. Probably all his messages were stopped. An extreme pessimist as to the power of Belgium to retard the German onslaught, he doubtless incurred the displeasure of the censors, perhaps more seriously in messages relating to business than in those which he thought he was sending to his daughter.

Her distress in the absence of all direct news may be imagined. Published dispatches on the progress of the war in Belgium were maddening to a person in Alma's situation. The Germans were checked to-day at every line of defense, and to-morrow flashes of the truth would burst like shellfire through the petty rampart of false hope. Still there seemed to be nothing in the military status up to the first week of September which involved immediate danger to persons in Ghent, or prevented their departure if they desired to go.

"It is the fault of the cables," Werner assured her, every time he reported another failure to get information. "Your parents and brother are safe, and they don't dream but that you know it."

He wasted many amiable efforts to divert the girl's mind from harrowing thoughts, but unfortunately Mrs. Bayne had almost destroyed Alma's power to profit by the voice of hope. Mrs. Bayne was a cheerful liar, by faith and practice, and she rose to this opportunity with exultation. Since the beginning of the world there had never been a better chance to deny the reality of evil. Every day the

misguided lady found news in the papers —and read it aloud to Alma—indicating that King Albert would drive the Germans out of Belgium. She was one of those persons whom the ultimate triumph of virtue does not satisfy or even interest; the devil must be overthrown to-day, and if he won't go down, let's say so anyway, and, oh, be joyful!

If you mix cheerfulness and falsehood sedulously enough, there will come a time when you can't distinguish one from the other, nor can any of your hearers. By this process Mrs. Bayne reduced Alma to the state in which she distrusted every person who approached her with a bright countenance—as Werner always did.

Holbach understood Mrs. Bayne, and had foreseen what effect she would produce. From the beginning he was unique among Alma's friends; he never tried to cheer her up. Scientific truth, properly simplified, was his model. He had no preference for the truth in itself, but he was perfectly willing to use it as a means to an end. Here was his chance, and he availed himself of it with tact and patience, until he gained the girl's complete confidence. Thus he made himself almost indispensable, and insured perpetual welcome, for there was always some delusion in that house which sanity must correct.

Meanwhile Holbach was trying to get news from Belgium, guiding himself by Werner's failures, and letting Werner spend most of the money wasted on experiments with the cable. Thus it came about that Holbach, at small expense, got the first authentic information. Kenyon had gone into Belgium by way of Antwerp, and had got no farther. Having undertaken the journey from America before his health was restored, he had suffered a dangerous relapse. His wife and son were with him in Antwerp.

Holbach took this message to Alma; laid it before her in such a way as to show that he credited her with sufficient fortitude; showed her—as no one else could have done, because she trusted no one else to speak the plain truth—that she must dismiss all wild ideas of crossing the ocean; and concluded by announcing that he himself would sail to-morrow, having already made his preparations.

In response to her outburst of surprise and gratitude he made no special explanation of his readiness to serve in this emergency. He made it seem natural. Alma herself could do nothing to help her parents, but a man might do much.

"The choice seemed to lie between Mr. Werner and me," he said, "and he is too much occupied with the business at this time."

In fact, he hadn't consulted Werner, who knew nothing of the cablegram as yet, but Holbach didn't mention that. He made no promises as to what he would accomplish, and Alma didn't require any. She seemed to be sending this wonderful man to help her grief-stricken mother, and the thought uplifted her spirits. You see, Holbach had just come to her with a success where others had failed. That sort of thing will sell a patent medicine even when the statement is a lie. Holbach had advertised himself very well, and the girl beheld him as the cure of great ills. She caught his hand and kissed it; wetted it with her tears. She could have flung herself into his arms, and he knew it, but he wisely denied himself the pleasure. That would come later. He couldn't postpone Mrs. Bayne, however; when she heard what he was going to do, she wept on his bosom with her arms around his neck, and prophesied the rescue of all Belgium.

Holbach's demeanor, when he said good-by to Alma next day, was admirably suited to her idea of him as he had built it up—a sincere, resolute, capable man, doing an act of self-sacrificing kindness with that simplicity which was the jewel of his nature.

And what was he really doing? Trying to win a girl's affection with intent to marry her for herself alone, apparently a very laudable proceeding—which shows that it isn't what you do in this world; it's chiefly how you do it, and what you are, back of the deed, that makes the difference between good and evil. Holbach avoided sentimentality and youthful enthusiasm, let his full age show and a little more, for it was his aim to win Alma's heart to maturity As a bright companion suited to her years, Werner could beat him a mile, and Holbach knew it.

He made a quick trip across the ocean, but suffered some delays in England, where he was not overwhelmed with evidences of cordiality, though he had taken the precaution to provide himself with unimpeach-

able evidences of his sympathy with the Allies. He kept his temper; no British official could irritate him to the point of making him forget what he wanted, even for an instant. And he was happy, every minute, because he was moving toward an end desired. He was determined that this voyage of his should lay Alma Kenyon under obligations of gratitude which she could never forget. So he confronted all obstacles with deep-burning zest, and overcame them.

He reached Antwerp on September twenty-second, six days before the siege began, but was unable to find the Kenyons or his own correspondent from whom he had obtained the news about them. By luck and diligence he learned that Kenyon had rallied, and that the family had started for their home, doubtless with the hope of rescuing some of their property, but they had not reached their destination. Following the trail, Holbach came upon the mother and son at the house of friends in a village near Ghent. Kenyon had died there. The widow, exhausted by unceasing vigils and hardships, was now acutely ill and seemed likely to follow her husband.

Holbach took charge of the situation; a stranger, he became the autocrat of the establishment, thereby undoubtedly saving the life of Mrs. Kenyon and perhaps of others. This he did merely by the exercise of judgment. He prevented a too hasty flight which would have killed Mrs. Kenyon; he gave her the rest which was essential till the climax of her illness was past. Meanwhile he made himself persona grata with certain men in authority; prepared a way of escape; and at the last moment marshaled the whole household literally from under the guns of the enemy, and after epic adventures landed them safe in England.

Mrs. Kenyon, a woman of splendid vigor and still young, was now on the way to recovery. She informed Holbach that she would not go to America; the war was her affair as much as if she were a man. She was already too far from the battle front toward which her face was set unchangeably until the end. Her charities for many years her given her experience in hospital management and the care of the sick, and it would be easy for her to enter the service of her country. The instincts of a mother made her glad that Alma should be out of harm's way for a while. Later the girl should serve, if necessary. As for the son, who was only eleven, he should go to his sister, if Mr. Holbach would undertake the care of him on the journey.

Mr. Holbach was delighted, both to take the boy whose admiration he had won, and to leave the mother who, he shrewdly suspected, classed him as a German despite his American birth. She had expressed her gratitude in unexceptionable terms, but she would never let him marry Alma if she could prevent it; and probably she could, being a lady of such indomitable spirit. Let her return to Belgium by all means, if there was any part of that country still penetrable. It might be a long time before she could get out. Fortunate all around, and filled with eagerness, Holbach set sail for America having little John Kenyon in his care.

The boy was carrying a long letter to Alma from their mother, who, after Holbach's report, had ample reason to distrust the ordinary means of communication. It may be interesting to note, in passing, that seven of her letters written during her husband's illness were delivered to Alma in a single day, in the spring of 1915. As to the contents of the one which John was charged with, Holbach felt a strong curiosity, suspecting that the story of his own distinguished services might not entirely fill the pages. He even questioned whether it would not be best that the lad should lose it on the way.

In order to resolve these doubts Holbach possessed himself of the letter, one night on shipboard, while the boy slept; and opened it with due care. Some passages in the early part were quite to his liking; then the tone changed and the man's worst apprehensions were more than realized. Mrs. Kenyon admonished her daughter not to fail in grateful recognition of Mr. Holbach's help, which had been vital in the exigency, but in all relations with him to consider carefully his character and motives. And she proceeded to portray that character and to suggest those motives, with the clarity of genius.

"Ha!" said Holbach aloud, with self-approval. "I knew that woman was clever as the devil."

He himself was clever enough to discover, after an hour's study, that by crossing out two words and forging a very little one,

the second page of the letter could be made to read on to the fifth, omitting the third and fourth, which contained all the objectionable matter. The pages were not numbered; the writing was with pencil; the forged word could be traced. Holbach did the job to admiration; resealed and restored the envelope; and went to bed well pleased.

A week afterward he sat attentive while Alma read most of her mother's message aloud to him and others, for the sake of her pride in the mother's splendid devotion. Holbach noted with satisfaction that a certain complicated sentence leading on from one page to another did not mar the general effect nor impress any one as odd.

CHAPTER III.

THE MERCHANT OF DEATH.

A second powerful interest had appeared in Holbach's mind since his close view of war. In Belgium, and later in England, he had heard prophesies of the use that would be made of poisonous gas. As a chemist, of course, the subject was not new to him, but he had never before given it more than a passing thought. Now, however, the world had undertaken war as its chief business for some years to come, and all instruments of death had risen to a first importance. Holbach was reminded of old man Werner's singular discovery, and he gave the matter serious attention.

Devil's Breath might be worth a great deal of money, but how was he to reap the harvest? He was more than doubtful whether he had any claim to ownership. All the protected or secret processes to which the Holbach-Werner company took title, when it came into corporate existence, were specified, and this was not among them.

Under the will of old man Werner it probably belonged to his widow, being included in the miscellaneous residue of his estate; but another clause of the will might be construed in favor of Edmund, who inherited all his father's personal effects in the laboratory. It was a toss-up, which of these owners would be the worse for Holbach to deal with. Edmund seemed to be a sort of pacifist, and viewed with disfavor even the making of ordinary munitions; he had refused a fat salary as consulting chemist to one of the big powder monkeys. If you could believe him, he would never let any discovery of his father's be used for the killing of men.

As for Mrs. Werner, if a hint about this hidden treasure should be conveyed to her, she would consult a certain young lawyer—an early admirer of hers in their home city of Lansing, Michigan. Holbach suspected that she would marry this man, if he ever got any money, though never if he didn't, but in the case of a colossal stake such as Devil's Breath promised to yield, she would doubtless take the lawyer into partnership, and count him a rich man forthwith.

Fortunately, Devil's Breath had not figured in the appraisal of the estate. Edmund had seen no value in it, and had never dreamed of including it in any inventory, or of mentioning it to his stepmother. In his opinion it ranked with a hundred other chemical freaks and mere curiosities scattered over his father's long career of research.

After meditating on this subject till he came to feel that Devil's Breath was his personal property, Holbach decided to play a lone hand. Accordingly he tried to steal the metal box in which the treasure reposed, but couldn't find it, though he remembered clearly where Edmund had put it away.

His first thought was that Edmund's sensitiveness about chemical slaughter was a blind; that he had seen the money in Devil's Breath, and was now experimenting with neo-eserine in secret; certainly the work was not being done in the company's laboratories. But after a few days' spying Holbach knew that Edmund was not engaged in any private research. His life was very open; all his hours could be accounted for; and Holbach was finally driven to the conclusion that the metal box had been emptied and relabeled, so that now he couldn't distinguish it from a dozen others of the same pattern that were in use. No doubt Edmund had destroyed the contents, except for the notebook which he might have put away with other relics of his father.

In the next week Holbach picked a good many locks, but his efforts were not rewarded. The idea that neo-eserine had vanished from the earth filled him with a sense of vast personal loss. He couldn't reconcile himself to such a damnable injustice.

In bed, gazing up into the darkness through long hours of many a night, he pieced together his scanty recollections of

all that old man Werner had told him about the neo-eserine process. The result was gratifying; there was more than he had supposed. It seemed worth while to set up a little secret laboratory, and see what could be done.

If the cat jumps up onto the keyboard of the piano, it is possible that she will strike the Lost Chord. And there was about as good a chance that Holbach would make neo-eserine by what he remembered of the process—not intricate nor laborious, but delicate; a thing of beauty bearing the stamp of genius. He did make it, however, and with no more labor than he could prudently devote to it in the course of two months. This achievement, though sufficiently remarkable, was like taking the Hindenburg Line, not victory but a prelude; there were other lines behind, and death lay entrenched in them all. Holbach had got neo-eserine, and now he was condemned to spend the watches of many a night in its murderous company, trying to discover how it could be disciplined to some discrimination so that it would kill the enemy alone.

But risking his life did not annoy Holbach; he enjoyed his hours in the laboratory, because he was getting closer to what he wanted, ever a little nearer as the weeks went by.

During this period numerous mice and guinea pigs entered suddenly into rest; a few dogs also; Holbach used our canine friends in the attempt to learn whether Devil's Breath gives warning through the sense of smell. Is there a zone of possible attenuation in which an animal approaching a source of this deadly vapor may discover its presence, and perhaps be saved? Apparently not. If there is anything that can be called an odor, a man will have as much chance of noticing it as he will of hearing the thunderclap when he is killed by lightning.

All this while the devil was a friend to the experimenter for the work's sake, and blew no fatal breath in his direction. Under the favor of this patron Holbach solved his problem, in the spring of 1915. He found a method of getting neo-eserine from solution as a chalky precipitate which will not go out of its way to kill anybody, while it is wet. When it begins to dry, in unnoticed spots, well, it would annihilate indiscriminately.

Fortunately it can be prevented from drying too fast by mixing it with fine salt, and moistening the air with jets of steam. In such conditions the stuff can be handled safely, as that word is defined in a munitions factory. When the mixture is submitted to sudden, intense heat, as in the flare of a bursting shell, virtually all the neo-eserine is converted into vapor—Devil's Breath—which is heavy enough to stay near the ground, thus serving the amiable ends of war.

Holbach now had something to sell, and he began cautiously to open a way toward a sale to the German government. This may be credited to him as a virtue, his interests prompting him to deal with the other side, but in his heart he favored Germany.

A week of these negotiations put more fear into him that he had ever felt for neo-eserine during all his experimental adventures with it in the valley of the shadow of death. By his standards these German agents in America did not know what caution was, and he foresaw their complete exposure as the inevitable result. Much as was his wish for Germany's success—so deep that he himself couldn't see to the bottom of it—still there was a limit; there was a strict reservation on his side of every bargain. He would not lose Alma.

On a hasty view it will seem strange that he should not have lost her already, but in fact she never in a reasoning moment classed him with the enemies of her country. He was an American; he had been indorsed by her father; he was accepted by Mrs. Bayne and her circle, strongly pro-Ally. His influence over Alma had been established, and strongly fortified by gratitude, before the resentments of war had penetrated her mind.

She had learned to trust in the accuracy of his judgments, and to believe what he said. For a year he had been teaching her how to think, and doing it with great skill; so that now a detractor of Holbach would have been compelled not only to overthrow Alma's opinion as to a matter of fact, but also the method by which all her serious opinions were formed—a much more difficult task. Her mother; supposing that Alma had received her careful analysis of the man, never went deeply into the subject; or if she did, the letters were among those that were lost, a fate which overtook three-fourths of their correspondence.

Moreover Mrs. Kenyon had been considerably influenced by her daughter's accounts of what Holbach was doing. Immediately after his return he had advised Alma to begin a course in nursing. That is, she thought he advised it, but in fact he took that side knowing that otherwise he must oppose a decision which she would inevitably make in the end. He and Werner, through their connections with the medical profession, had secured for her the most exceptional advantages, and in addition they were giving her special instruction, in their laboratories. A quick, clear-headed student, she was making wonderful progress.

"I am only a recruit, dear mama," she wrote, "not yet fit for service and impatient of the days; but, oh, I am making such splendid use of them!" And the mother replied, with the authority of hard experience, counseling always a thorough preparation, and sending her fervent thanks to those who were so wisely guiding her girl.

Holbach understood the strength of his position, and had only the most vague, impalpable impression of its only weakness which issued from a ghostland not within his view. Sometimes in sleep, less often in brief resting moments of the day, when her thoughts unshepherded sought remembered fields, Alma would behold Belgium and recoil at sight of gray-clad soldiers sweeping across it to the accompaniment of nameless horrors; their armies marching over her father's grave, their squadrons of the air menacing her mother's life. Childishly simple-minded was the artist of these visions, and all the soldiers looked alike, an infinite series of twins, children of one infernal father.

And occasionally, in more rational moments, when Holbach entered a room or marched athwart her field of view with his strong stride, she would be aware of a dilation of the eyes and of an intake of the breath through shut teeth; and would be reminded, to her own reproach, of those invaders ignorant of mercy whom she saw in dreams. Then she would hasten to requite Holbach with kindness; and the man had many moments of elation that taxed his self-control, springing from this cause which it was impossible he should suspect.

But even these encouragements never quite persuaded him that he had won the game. Alma was far less mature in heart than in mind; hard study was preventing her from feeling any sex stimulus arising out of the excitement of war; differing thus from the majority whose unguided efforts and accompanying enthusiasms had no intellectual aspect. Holbach contented himself as best he could with the increase of small familiarities which, as yet, carried no serious implication. They added fuel to the fire in his own bosom, however, and the balacing reaction inspired him with prudence.

At first he had seen little difference in risk between dealing with Germany and with England or France, for the sale of his diabolical merchandise. Alma would as soon mate with Beelzebub as with a man who helped the enemies of her country; but the loss of her would be as certain, though perhaps less painful in its manifestations, if she should learn that he was a merchant of stolen goods. What turned the scale with him was distrust of the German agents; he was afraid that their communications with the home government would be intercepted by British or American secret-service men, and the whole matter, including his own name, become known. Wherefore he began to pull back his foot, which he had not yet put in very far.

While engaged in this strategic retreat he received a stunning surprise. It came to him through the one man whom he had dared to trust, the go-between in his negotiations—for he himself had gone little further with the German agents than to look them over. By the go-between he was informed that there had been communication with Berlin, and that the new gas was known to German chemists. They called it Devil's Breath, and the secret process had been bought in America!

Without the name there could have been no certainty that it was the same gas and the same process. Holbach had not given any real clew to what it was or how it was made; he had permitted his agent to know only its lethal action and such of its properties as would be essential to use in war. Of course he had not mentioned the name, Devil's Breath, to any human being. He was amazed that Werner should have done so, in making the sale to Germany. This would prove a very serious indiscretion, in the opinion of Holbach, on whose calendar the entry of the United States into the war stood marked already—February 1, 1917, a fair shot at that distance.

The disclosure of Edmund's performance was good news to Holbach; it made his path smooth and safe; it rejoiced him exceedingly. He had already decided to sell in another market; England would now be more eager to get the goods. Secrecy was still enjoined by prudence, but detection had lost its sharpest tooth. There would be a wild scene with Mrs. Harriet Werner, and a forced settlement of her claim as owner of what he had sold; but he need fear no difference with Alma; she could be led to countenance his act and even to applaud it.

He would tell her that he had supposed the process to be Edmund's property; that he had learned with amazement and pain of Edmund's traffic with Germany; that because of their lifelong friendship he had refrained from exposing the man, and had contented himself with making the only possible reparation by giving the secret to the Allies. If that was what he had done with this implement of war, Alma would not care how he had come by it. The mercenary aspect of the transaction could be shuffled out of sight. The price would never be made public unless through a suit by Mrs. Werner, and this could be prevented by pecuniary sacrifice. Mrs. Werner would not insist on vengeance; she would want nothing but money.

And let the issue be what it might, he now had the power to ruin Edmund in Alma's regard at a moment's notice. This was a very welcome asset. A scruple of honor is a weak thing to bind a man when he really wants something; and though Edmund had not given any signs of rivalry, his increasing familiarity with Alma emphasized those natural advantages which Holbach feared. Despite Edmund's uncommon gift of good looks, he had never figured as a lady's man, but he would have been the sweetest big brother a girl could have; and he was drifting into some such relation with Alma. The beauty of their intimacy had a sanctioned fitness which Holbach couldn't rival by any artifice—just as in the occasional evenings given to music Edmund and Alma sang together, their own human voices blending, while Holbach as accompanist entered into the harmony through mechanical means alone. At times the man had suffered killing pangs of jealousy, but these had been rare, and now they were cured. He held Edmund at his mercy, and keenly relished the thought.

As to Devil's Breath, he learned from his intermediary that the German agents were still anxious to negotiate, but that they insisted on knowing who the principal was, and coming into touch with him. This meant, of course, that Edmund had sold the neoeserine process substantially as his father had left, lacking the practical development which Holbach had accomplished. A good price could be got for the addition, but not so much as England would pay for the whole.

"String them along," was his instruction to his agent. "Find out just what they've got. Information is all I want from those fellows. Make them tell the truth, if they know how."

Meanwhile his study of the situation convinced him that a sale to England could be made to much better advantage in that country than here. The Holbach-Werner company had contracts with the British government for certain medicines and prophylactics, and it was likely that an occasion for a voyage might arise in natural course, which would be preferable. He waited almost to the end of his patience, and then, in the late summer of 1915 the opportunity came in the form of an invitation for Edmund to attend a conference of chemists in London. Edmund did not wish to go, and Holbach most obligingly consented to represent the company. Thus it was arranged.

He promised Alma that he would cross the Channel if that should prove possible, with a message for her mother, and bring back such a report as the girl longed for —the spoken word, the full account of one who has seen the life. Reminded so vividly of that other journey, Alma felt all her gratitude rekindled. She was emotionally stirred, and Holbach profited thereby, though somewhat sparingly.

He was afraid of erring with Alma when there would be no time for setting himself right. His extreme caution gave her little opportunity for a direct response, and as she had none ready, she did not help him to be explicit. He was well aware, he said, that her mind and heart were wholly given to preparation for her country's service. Let that come first. The war would end some day, and the lives of men and women would return to natural channels. Meanwhile his best desire was to advise and aid her as in the year that was past.

He was called away from her for a little while, and as all such journeys now involved an element of new risk, he wished her to know how she had changed his life, if only with a dream. That dream he left with her to hold till his return, or to put away with a kind thought, if chance should make this parting final. Far likelier their comradeship, briefly interrupted, would resume its way, just as before until the hour of her choice.

Had he asked for any definite assurance, she would not have given it. Had she been sure of her own ultimate refusal, she would have spoken plainly. But she was sure of nothing except that the suggested postponement of decision met her views exactly. She tried merely to be kind. Whether she said anything comprehensible as an answer, she couldn't remember, when he was gone.

She reviewed her own conduct in this scene with humility, and magnified the excellence of Karl's behavior. Her impression was of a man of wonderful intelligence but not naturally gentle, who had disclosed the rarest courtesy and sweetness in opening his heart to a girl too witless and confused to play her part appropriately. She wondered whether she would ever feel toward him an emotion that would prompt her to impassioned, living words; carry her to heights. She was inclined to hope so, but that would be far in the future. He would barely have returned when she would be prepared to sail away; and at that point in her reveries the thunder of a thousand cannons drowned the voice of love.

As for Holbach, he was well satisfied with himself under the circumstances. He might have done much worse; he had not been fit. He had suffered great mental exhaustion as the result of double toil, preparing in the daytime for his legitimate business errand, and, after evenings with Alma, giving the dark hours of the night to work in his secret laboratory, where finally he destroyed all evidence of the use to which it had been put.

He did not dare to take with him any apparatus or even any memoranda—not knowing to what rigors of examination some slight mischance might subject him. It was necessary to cram his memory with every step of his processes and with every mechanical detail. He knew how lucky he had been in his work; how he had stumbled upon short cuts of method and ingenuities of device, such as come easily in fortunate hours, but depending not on any strict chain of reason, are readily forgotten. Should one of these be lost in a corner of his mind, ten years of search might not suffice to find it. And it would be necessary for him to work fast in England.

With the idea of saving time he sealed a few grams of neo-eserine precipitate, with a protective portion of fluid, in a little glass tube, and put it into a stylographic pen; but at the last moment he decided not to carry it, and through inadvertence he left it in his desk at home. When he remembered this, on shipboard, he was not much disturbed. The pen would lie unnoticed; certainly nobody would discover what it contained.

He had sailed in a middle-sized ship, the *Numantian,* that carried no armament against submarines except her cutwater, with a reinforced collision bulkhead behind it. This weapon the captain was well disposed to use, in a pinch, but the fates were unkind, and sent him more game than he could hunt. After a stormy passage, for the season, he reached the danger zone on a foggy morning, and ran out into clear weather to find a U-boat on each side of him. Not being able to ram them both, he surrendered at discretion.

The Germans boarded his ship, announced her doom, and sent all hands to the boats. The captain's boat and another were ordered alongside one of the submarines while her consort sank the *Numantian.* Down she went, with her cargo for which so many men had toiled in fields, and mines, and factories; bread for which women hungered, implements for use in the war which had made them widows; all a loss, except some hundred per cent of profits, prudently insured.

The captain, two or three officers, and a half dozen passengers, seemingly selected at random, were taken on the U-boat to be questioned, some on deck, a few below. With small delay they were released; and first one boat, then the other was sent away.

"Where is Mr. Holbach?" asked the captain, at whose right hand that gentleman had sat when they pulled away from the *Numantian.*

"In the other boat, sir," some one replied.

And with that the captain tried to get the boats together, as the fog was closing

again. He failed; and one of them never came to land, though the distance was not great nor the weather rough at any time. It was suspected that she had sunk under the bow of some vessel plowing through the fog, though no such incident was definitely reported.

CHAPTER IV.

A PRISONER UNDER THE SEA.

In fact Mr. Holbach went down beneath the surface of the sea, but not in that manner. He had been whisked out of sight aboard the submarine, and when she sought the depths for safety he was still a guest. This hospitality he owed to the German agents in America with whom he had opened negotiations as to Devil's Breath, not quite cautiously enough. They had worked down to him; they had sent his portrait and description to Germany, and had cabled the news of his departure and the probable nature of his errand.

He got no satisfactory explanation from the commander of the submarine, but on arrival in a German port the case was set before him. The chemists in the service of his majesty would be much obliged for all that Mr. Holbach knew about Devil's Breath. They would pay reasonably for the information.

Holbach declined. The imperial government, however, could not permit him to sell unlimited death and destruction for use against Germany. It would be necessary to detain him in a prison camp. He retorted that he was an American citizen. The imperial government, he was assured, would take cognizance of this claim, and put it in the way of investigation, hoping to arrive at a certainty in the matter shortly after the termination of the war.

Holbach responded that the formality of conducting him to the prison camp might be omitted. He would not cause the imperial government the trouble of making any part of a prison camp worse than it was at present, merely for the sake of impressing upon him the inconvenience of residing there. He was willing to concede the point; and would respectfully request to be informed as to the alternative.

It appeared that this would be detention not amounting to imprisonment, in a fortified city, conditions of comfort being guaranteed during such time as Mr. Holbach should strictly observe the rules of conduct prescribed. In addition he should receive a payment to be fixed by a commission, a hundred thousand dollars to be the minimum if his processes should meet certain requirements.

The requirements were well within the results of his experimental demonstrations in his laboratory in New York, and he accepted the terms since he could do no better. What he really secured was the privilege of retaining his own money. He had thought it possible that he might need to use cash, in England; and in addition to the funds provided by the Holbach-Werner Company, he carried about ten thousand dollars in a belt. Apparently the imperial government understood this article of the bargain, and made it a point of honor. Throughout all of Holbach's subsequent relations with Germany a mysterious ægis protected the belt around his body.

He spent about a month in laboratories, virtually a prisoner but not harshly treated by his wardens, while between him and the men of science with whom he came in contact during this time the most perfect courtesy was maintained. When all that he knew had been extracted from him, he was detached from the work. Further experiment would be necessary in order to solve the problems of quantity production; and he was told that the commission aforesaid would wait upon the issue of these endeavors.

He was removed to the place of detention, where suitable quarters were provided, and he was put under parole not to violate any of innumerable regulations. One of these forbade him to attempt communication with persons in the United States, or with its representatives or ordinary citizens abroad. At the earliest opportunity he broke this provision of the treaty by bribing certain persons to transmit letters, and he was led to believe that at least some of those to Alma were really forwarded. They were not; he spent his money for nothing.

Even had he known this he would have suffered less than the facts warranted; for he did not suspect that any loss of life resulted from the sinking of the *Numantian*, or that his own fate would be unknown. Vanity, perhaps, prevented him from imagining that the ship's captain did not know what had become of him. Of course, the German government would deny that he was

a prisoner—he had discovered that his name was Schwartz in the record of these proceedings—but the truth would certainly be made apparent to his friends in New York. They would be puzzled; indeed, he hoped so, in view of the true cause of his misfortune. But that the United States should regard him as a victim of submarine warfare, along with a number of others, and should suppose that a demand for his release would have to be addressed to Davy Jones and not to Germany—this never entered his thoughts.

He looked for some action on the part of the ambassador, but he might as well have looked to the man in the moon. On the ambassador's books Karl Holbach was numbered with the dead; and the idea of searching for him in Germany was never suggested.

It goes without saying that such a man would plan to escape. The subject was rarely absent from his mind, and he derived a keen, cold pleasure from it. He understood the danger; he loved life as much as anybody; but physical fear had very little restraining influence upon his conduct. The partial success which he achieved was due to nerve as much as to his skill in strategy.

It involved the deadly offense of wearing a German officer's uniform, but only for a very short time while he was passing beyond a certain line. Then he sent it back; and by his arrangements the intoxicated gentleman to whom it belonged should have found it beside his bed when he awoke.

The bribery necessitated by this feat was not so expensive as might be supposed. Holbach still had more than six thousand dollars in his belt, and he had reached a rural district where men ought to come cheaper. They did, but apparently they were dear at any price, for he was betrayed and captured after having been at large less than a week.

Very reasonably he expected to be shot; but, in fact, he was not even informed of any definite accusation against him. After a harrowing delay he was placed under guard for a brief journey which ended at Kiel. There, alone in a room with a naval officer, he heard his doom pronounced.

"You are Karl Schwartz," said this officer; "and you have enlisted in the submarine service."

Holbach made a futile protest, based on his American citizenship. The officer led him to a blank wall.

"Stand there and think it over," said the officer, "while I glance at some papers;" and he sat down at his desk. Holbach looked into the eyes of an imaginary firing squad for ten minutes, and decided that there was only one way to dodge the bullets. An hour later he had begun his period of training for undersea warfare.

From April of 1916 to May of 1918 "Karl Schwartz" was a seaman on various submarines, having no liberty when ashore, in which respect he differed little from his mates. The chief difference was in his luck; he saw men transferred; knew that they had sailed away, and that they never came back. But the craft he sailed in was immune to all the perils of the most hazardous service in the history of naval warfare. Superstition began to weave legends around his name. The U-boat from which Karl Schwartz was transferred would be lost the next time she went out. Our boat is safe; Karl Schwartz is aboard. Such rumors penetrated a thousand barriers of secrecy, and traveled even to Mediterranean bases.

Holbach's education had detached his superstitions from his beliefs; being lucky meant nothing to him, in the ordinary sense, any more than the emotions aroused by good religious music influenced him to behold the universe as divinely directed. What he beheld was the emotions as phenomena of his consciousness, and they possessed no evidential value for any creed of gods or ghosts. The surviving of so many perils gave him an agreeable sensation as to the future, but no mental assurance whatever.

He had a reasoned expectation of death, probably by drowning in a great steel coffin that would rest forever on the ocean's floor. The best way to prevent it was to be prepared for every chance of escape when ashore, and to work for the safety of his ship, when afloat. Therefore he performed his own duties with admirable skill and precision, encouraged discipline, promoted cheerfulness, and tactfully made use of his growing reputation as a lucky man. Naturally he was highly valued, and only the special nature of his case denied him the promotions often recommended by superiors ignorant of his story.

In his heart he was sustained by determination, by desire, by the unquenchable passion that had burned into his vitals. He had not relinquished his hopes of Alma any more than his habit of breathing. He suf-

fered a thousandfold worse from dread of accident, illness, death to her, or from frenzied jealous visions, than from apprehension for himself. And when one judges him for what he subsequently did, one must remember how many men were driven to madness, to drugs, to self-destroying dissipations of all kinds, by the mere externals of the life he led, without those inward torments which he endured in the darkness of utter ignorance as to what the days were doing with his most precious interests in the world.

He knew that in the ordinary course of events Alma would have gone to some part of the war zone in the fall of 1915. Two and a half years had now passed. She might have died long ago; if she lived, she must suppose him to be still a prisoner in Germany, hopeless of rescue till the war's end. He would not believe himself forgotten; he had so trained her to reject all unproved war news coming out of Europe that she would not have credited any story of his death. In what form did the memory of him dwell in her mind? There was madness in that question. He took refuge in a deliberate invention, the brain telling to the heart for its comfort a romantic novel flattering to his hopes, yet carefully confined to obvious fictional form lest he should impair his grasp of reality. Never did he give up the thought of her as his, and in the course of time he came to have a false recollection of their single love scene, and to hold her pledged to him in honor.

He thought it improbable that she would have remained in continuous war service for so long a period. He pictured her as having returned to America for a rest. Jealousy took hold of him on account of Edmund Werner, and so obsessed him that he had difficulty at times in recognizing it as an emotional manifestation without a basis in objective reality. It often wore so plainly the aspect of a revelation, that even Holbach's utter contempt for such unmanly nonsense hardly served to steady him.

This delusional tendency became especially acute under the strain of physical nearness, when, in March of 1918, his destiny brought him to American waters. For several days he was in sight of the long sand bar that skirts the southern shore of Long Island. At one time he was within fifty miles of his own home, and of that neighboring house where she had lived and might then be sheltered.

Once, at night, if his ship had held for only a few minutes longer to the course that she was steering, he would have made an attempt to slip overboard unobserved, trusting his body to the ocean for a long swim. It would have been better if the ship had not veered to seaward. Holbach had recently been ill; he was greatly reduced in strength. It is virtually certain he would have drowned—an enviable fate, by comparison.

Shortly afterward the U-boat was on Georges Banks, engaged in the destruction of fishing vessels. Many prisoners were taken aboard, temporarily. One crew that contained two Portuguese and a Spaniard, recently shipped and not long on this side of the water, was viewed with suspicion and quickly put aboard a prize. A little later three cases of Spanish influenza appeared on the U-boat, possibly as a result of this contact, for the disease was not then epidemic in America, and had not been detected or thought of among the prisoners, except in this single instance.

Holbach was one of the stricken. The other two cases were light, but his was severe, and pneumonia developed. Under the conditions almost any other man would have died; perhaps almost any other man of that crew would have been assisted to do so, in the interests of the common safety. But the invalid happened to be "Lucky Schwartz;" and the officers would hardly have dared throw him overboard if he were dead, for fear of the effect on the crew's spirits already a subject of anxiety.

Efforts were made to put him aboard a U-boat homeward bound, but he was refused; indeed, the two vessels never came into contact. Engine trouble developed on the one that carried Holbach, and she could not reach the appointed place. Everything broke down; for days together she was a drifting hulk, often unable to submerge. But though her natural powers of defense were thus impaired her luck remained invincible. She escaped capture by a series of miracles. The fog behaved as if it were controlled from Berlin. Whenever it was absolutely necessary for the ship to make a few miles in a hurry, she made them; when she couldn't go, the fog came, and wrapped her in its mantle.

The commander did not dare attempt the return passage. He had received by wireless a promise of help, and he held his posi-

tion, except when chased away. Meanwhile food ran short, as to certain articles; certainly there was nothing on board that was fit sustenance for a man in Holbach's condition. Already reduced by his previous illness he became a skeleton; he starved, but would not die.

One thing only he did not lack, and that was nursing. The care of him was a religion. Every fine day, when the ship's safety permitted, he lay on deck, a bundle of bones animated only by a fierce determination and a kind of wild joy in conquest over an enemy. He was defeating death, and he knew it, and exulted.

Whatever is self-centered is ignoble, even courage if it be thus tainted; but it is better than cowardice, and often strikingly ornamental. Certainly Holbach's character was gold-plated with it, in this epoch, and he deserved the admiration that he got.

On a forenoon in May the U-boat lay in a fog, but the sea was smooth, the air mild; and Holbach basked on deck enjoying every gasp. A random wind parted the gray draperies, and disclosed a fishing schooner almost dead ahead, and less than a mile away. The commander decided to get this vessel while he could see her—which might be only a few seconds—so he opened fire with the bow gun, and forged ahead at his best speed toward the prey.

The fishermen were seen frantically trying to get into their dories; and then a shell hit the schooner on the waterline, just even with the mainmast, and seemed to blow in the whole side of her. Smoke, spray, and splinters hid the vessel for a little; then the fog closed round her with a swirl.

The U-boat was kept going at the best of her limping gait till it was thought the distance had been almost covered, and then she was slowed down; but though the schooner could hardly have sunk so soon she was not to be seen. Voices were heard, and groans; one man seemed to be raving with pain; but these sounds were not all from the same place, and perhaps none of them came from the schooner, more probably from her boats that were separating as they rowed away.

Discipline on the submarine had gone to pieces, along with everything else, as Holbach sitting on the deck far aft had excellent occasion to observe. Only the forward gun was properly manned; the other was deserted, and the men were in a straggling group looking idly out to starboard whence came most of the sounds. They saw a very little water, and a plenty of fog; it had thickened till, from Holbach's place, the men farthest forward were a company of shadows. No voice was raised to report a dory that was floating, with no visible occupants, off the port beam; Holbach alone noticed this object as the U-boat glided slowly by, and it looked to him like something he had waited for since God knew when, and had beaten death to get.

Without a moment's hesitation that rack of bones, ravaged by disease and with barely flesh enough to hold itself together, crept to the ship's side and gently rolled overboard. He was so vitalized by determination that he forgot his weakness; and, besides, so good a swimmer always has a few strokes left in him while life remains. It is no great miracle that he swam the distance; the worst should have come afterward. The odds were a thousand to one that he couldn't climb into the dory, but he didn't think of that till he was aboard. Then the wonder of it came to him, and he laughed with the strangled bark of an expiring porpoise, and fainted away.

When he came to his senses rain was falling in his face, a momentary shower; it ceased before he had gathered strength to struggle to his knees. He looked around and saw only a small circle of bare and leaden sea; no submarine; and the confirmed infidel thanked God aloud.

The sight of a dead man lying on his face in the bottom of the dory did not startle Holbach appreciably; he seemed to remember having noticed him, just before fainting, with a dreamlike inspiration of some use to which he might be put. This was recalled, after an effort, and Holbach proceeded to strip the man, first pulling out a splinter of wood which had been driven into his back. The wound proved to have been small; death had resulted from a broken neck. He might have been hurled high by the exploding shell, to fall beyond the far rail of the schooner into the boat alongside.

Holbach changed to the dry clothes, saving his own for extra warmth; they could be disposed of at the last moment when rescue was in sight. He weighted the naked body, and gave it burial in the deep; then he took stock of the estate to which he had fallen heir. The pockets contained quite a tidy sum, for a fisherman, and a little book

giving his name, Augustus Westcott, and showing payments on Liberty Bonds through a bank in Gloucester. There was an unfinished letter to a friend in Newark, asking about work in the shipyards. Holbach noted this paragraph:

> I've got no reason to stay in Gloucester now that my folks are all dead. The old crowd is scattered, on account of the war, and I feel like a stranger here, except when I sit on the head of the wharf with my feet hanging over. Every sculpin and flounder down below knows the soles of my rubber boots, and if I should fall overboard, they'd say: "Oh hell; here comes Gloomy Gus Westcott." But there's few human beings who'd notice that I was gone.

A half-pint flask nearly full of fair whisky, very welcome, completed Holbach's inheritance. There was drinking water in plenty, but no food; yet for the remainder of that day the castaway seemed to thrive better fasting than on his late fare. He even found strength to row a little toward the declining sun that warmed him in the late hours of the afternoon. The effort was useless but agreeable, since it seemed to bring him nearer to the fulfilment of that hope which had never died in his breast.

Rescue came with dawn; and toward the end of that day a destroyer northward bound touched at Portland, and sent to a hospital in that city Augustus Westcott, seaman, a survivor from the *Hattie Collins*, of Gloucester, sunk by a submarine in the forenoon of May 12th.

The patient disappeared before he could be put to bed, but that was no new thing. Poor persons often take alarm in the anterooms of hospitals, and glide away unnoticed. He was seen no more in Portland after that day, nor sought by any friend; and in Gloucester whence he hailed, his failure to return was not the occasion of disappointment to any committee of reception. If the brief, indefinite descriptions in the press excited doubt as to the identity of the rescued man, the spoken comment had as much effect as the ripple on the sea when Holbach sank the sailor's naked body into everlasting silence. Like many others of the same melancholy cast Gus Westcott had possessed a nice eye for facts; few human beings knew that he was gone.

Continued use of Westcott's name would have been dangerous, of course, but the time was not ripe for the reincarnation of Karl Holbach. Still in the guise of a seafarer, he went on toward his destination, and with an eye to future possibilities he preserved the more important of the papers he had taken from the dead. The Odyssey was not yet ended, and Holbach knew it well. By consenting to go to the hospital he had escaped being personally conducted to Gloucester, which had been the friendly alternative proposed; he was now foot loose, free from German bondage, traveling in his own land with money in abundance for good living, but he was not safe.

In all the months since he had sold out to Germany not one word of reliable information had reached him as to the results of his disclosure. Exaggerated news of the great Picardy drive, begun in March, had been circulated just before he sailed, with rumors of a new development of gas warfare. Naturally he had suspected that Devil's Breath had burst upon the world at last in full force. But doubtless it had been tried out on a small scale before being employed in a major operation. Something of its nature and history might be known in America; and prudence demanded that he look into this matter before disclosing himself. He had escaped being shot for just cause in Germany; it would be hard to encounter that fate in the United States, under military law or from the fury of a mob. Wild tales of violence over here had often come to him.

He had not forgotten that the name Devil's Breath was known in Germany, an excellent clew for spies. If this had led to an investigation of the Holbach-Werner company, a search of the house on West End Avenue would have resulted, and perhaps the discovery of a pen bearing the monogram, K. H., and containing something that would have been a most welcome surprise for the officers of the secret service. This might have given Werner a chance to deny his own connection with the sale of Devil's Breath, and to shift the whole blame on Holbach. It was a time for wary walking.

He cared less for his own life than for news of Alma; and it was with difficulty that he restrained his impulse to make use of the long-distance telephone as soon as he was free of the hospital in Portland. If the Werner household had remained intact, there was one member of it whom he might dare to trust; one who had trusted him, a good many years ago, with miserable results, con-

cealed and forgiven. She might still be in service there; she would not have improved her condition in life by marriage, as he knew very well. Impatience urged him to the risk, but eventually he harkened to the voice of caution.

He would make full use of the disguise with which fate had favored him. He would approach his old home in the character of a poor sailorman, and guide his subsequent conduct by such hints as could be safely gathered in the neighborhood.

He might have been in New York next morning, but through ignorance of routes he took a train for Boston; spent the night in that city, and reached his destination toward four o'clock of the afternoon.

CHAPTER V.

MAKING A MOCKERY OF LONG HOPES.

A tall apartment house shut off Holbach's view as he came near to West End Avenue, walking down from Broadway. Twenty paces more, and he would see the two dwellings where lay the answer to all his questions. The lists in the latest telephone directory had already confirmed his hopes, so far as that could be expected. Nothing of Alma, naturally; she might live within the glare of war's red curtain, or have passed beyond it to the abode of peace; but one of those interior voices which he scorned in calmer moments now gained authority over his weakness, and told him she was here.

He who has traveled far knows the concentrated impatience in the final stretch, brief in itself but clogged with the residue of all slow hours which the spirit has not mastered by the way. In Holbach's case this inescapable misery was intensified to something like the breaking point of a mechanism long so cruelly overtaxed. To meet Alma and die at her feet might be a fine romantic climax, but it had no place in the story as his imagination had constructed it.

Give him two months of scientific treatment, combined with freedom, fresh air and hope, and he would recover all his strength, regain his natural looks, renew his youth. He never doubted this as a possibility, but his confidence was of the rational sort, leading him to discern, not to ignore, the dangers in his path. Collapse at this time, though death be not considered, would involve disaster. Policemen, ambulances, and hospitals were his enemies. There were papers in his belt which he had not cared to destroy, and they bore his name.

He had prepared his mind, therefore, for sudden encounters, but he had not fully foreseen the effect of nothing whatever. Insensibly he had expected too much from mere walls and windows. Now he looked across at those two dwellings, and the lack of any adequate response struck him with faintness. Like the countenances of two commonplace acquaintances they expressed only their own unaltered dullness and incapacity for emotion.

A sense of vacancy possessed his mind for a moment; he was unable to think of the next thing to do; and presently he found that he had not the strength to do it, whatever it might be. His unguided feet had carried him across the way, and he had halted—partly from physical weakness, but more from failure of the will—directly in front of the Werner residence.

An old stone carriage block had never been removed from the curb. There came to Holbach a realization that he must hang on to his consciousness, and not faint and fall. He dared not attempt another step. Probably without seeing the stone, but at the prompting of mere animal memory that it was there, he sat down upon it; and his head sank forward on his breast.

Images out of the last few days passed before him, in disorderly procession—the dory, rank with tar and fish; the dead man, and the feel of his naked body in the grim effort to lift it over the rail; the lonely night of bodily wretchedness and splendid hope; the great sun rising out of the sea. And with that he raised his head, and looked straight into Alma's eyes.

She stood at a window of the Werner residence; and Holbach asked nothing else than that she should stand there, and not disappear. If his sight had been clearer and the distance less he might have noted those slight changes which the years had made, and they would have reassured him; but as he beheld her she was too accurately the creature of many dreams. He had seen her very often, of late; she had attended him in the height of his illness more faithfully than the most devoted of his mates, but always she had withdrawn from him through a wall of steel into the ocean. If now she had slowly stepped back out of the waning daylight that revealed her, she would have exactly duplicated a thousand visions of

delirium. But she maintained her place, and presently his mind took hold on reality.

A voice disturbed him, and he saw a woman standing at the head of the steps that led down to the basement entrance. Miriam, the maid; he barely recognized her. Here certainly was change enough in three years. Her youth, once stubbornly retained, had now vanished, and her prettiness; she was both stout and haggard, a disfavoring and strange combination. He was affected unpleasantly, and with a tinge of resentment, as if the poor woman had willfully intruded upon him, touching a sore topic with her words and hurting his self-esteem.

She came scross the pavement toward him, and he was conscious of alarm. He did not wish to be known, and who but she should know him? Deep in his bosom the old sense of guilt, implanted when his heart was softer, dreaded detection.

He need have had no fear. Holbach, stripped of his firm flesh and ruddy color, was a new individual. What may be called the accessories of his disguise were excellent—the rough clothes, the unkempt hair and ragged beard—but the essential of it was in that peculiar mask of indescribable quality which illness and starvation and imprisonment under the sea had put upon his countenance.

Moreover he had the advantage of a voice which required no effort of control to guard against betrayal. The recent ravages of disease in his lungs and throat had forced him to a feeble, hoarse, and gasping utterance as different as possible from the strong, assertive tone of his natural speech. During his captivity he had used German, for the most part; and those of his mates who spoke English had been the least educated of the crew, from whom he had acquired a vernacular that now served him well.

"Are you hungry?" Miriam asked.

"You've said it, miss," responded Holbach. "But how'd you know?"

"Mrs. Werner knows what hungry people look like," Miriam answered. "She's been in Belgium."

"Mrs. Werner?" Holbach's mind clutched vainly for an instant at the familiar significance of the name; but it was idle to suppose that the former mistress of that house had been in Belgium. The interests of Mrs. Harriet Werner were of a different kind. "There, at the window?" he found the strength to ask.

He had raised his eyes again to Alma, where she stood as before, but with what anguish, what despair, what flaming frenzy of rage he now gazed at her. He steadied himself with both hands clutching at the edges of the stone. All that was real before his eyes was shattered to a whirl of formless things, and he saw Edmund Werner's face; the white teeth gleamed as the man seemed to laugh.

Holbach put up his hands to his breast. In a pocket was a small automatic pistol, his own that had been with him when he deserted the submarine. As he felt the outline of the weapon he saw Edmund's face suddenly blackened, and streaked with blood.

"What did you say?" he asked, for Miriam had been speaking. She had turned toward the house, at the suggestion of his glance, and had seen her mistress.

"I said, yes; that's Mrs. Werner at the window. She told me I could ask you into the house, and give you something to eat."

"That sounds good," responded Holbach, rising easily, his weakness gone. "I'm near starved."

He took breath, the air whistling in his nostrils.

"I hope you'll say to Mrs. Werner that I'm much obliged; and to Mr. Werner, too, if he's at home now—maybe not, at this time of day."

"Mr. Werner hasn't come home from business yet," said Miriam; and led him into the house.

Holbach was thinking, "Do I wish to live, after I have settled my score with him? What does she deserve?" He was aware of indecision as to Alma; he had always thought of her as subject to his own influence, therefore she now appeared to him as something less than a free agent. Even as to the killing of Edmund restraints began to operate. The habit of his mind was insisting on a contemplation of the deed as something not merely to be done, but in a certain way, toward a definite end. He had begun, half consciously, to consider methods and results, and to look less narrowly at the act of murder than would have been possible to the natural man. Emotionally, Alma had become to him an object of aversion rather than desire, but she was Edmund's property which it might be better vengeance to take than to destroy.

That there was still a chance of taking

her, ultimately, if he should want her, the nature of his situation forced him to remember. For he had to play his part with Miriam, from moment to moment, and was thus constantly reminded that though openly present in that house, he was virtually hidden from the dwellers therein.

Every glance that Miriam gave him was an added assurance. He was a stranger to her. She saw a man, and Holbach in a mirror saw the same; but *he* knew that the man was nobody, a transitory appearance. If this creature of a day should kill and then escape, he must be apprehended very soon or never at all, for he had no future in the world and would leave it by an exit more mysterious than the grave. Then Karl Holbach would appear, and lay hold on Alma by her conscience and a broken pledge.

He never doubted his own rights. A prisoner enduring deadly hardships he had suffered gross wrong from the treachery of a comfortable scoundrel and a fickle woman. He would kill the one and take the other, so making his revenge complete; for, though the griefs of the dead are a fiction of the living, yet the sense of triumph in the slayer's heart is real, when he has taken the other's wife and goods.

Seated in the servants' dining room he watched Miriam arranging a place for him at the table. She asked his name, and he gave one that had a satisfactory sound; and told how he had served on a steamer that had hit a mine off the Delaware Capes. He had been twenty days in an open boat, ill most of the time.

"And wounded, besides," said she, with sympathy, bending down to look at the back of his coat. "Did you mend that?"

"Yes," he answered; "and what's under it will mend itself, in time." Then, with the hundredth part of his mind he replied to her questions about the injury, and the sufferings of this imaginary ship's company.

She listened with complete belief. The old cook came in, she that had fed him with dainties when he was a child; and she regarded with wondering curiosity this strange waif from the sea, but suspicion did not enter her mind. No one need ever know that Karl Holbach had returned.

To execute vengeance and yet suffer nothing, perhaps even to gain—this would afford the fullest satisfaction. To kill Edmund at night, and escape; it might be done. He must evade pursuit long enough to regain his health; and meanwhile keep always on the move, so that the great change in him would nowhere be remarked. The outlines of a plan were already forming in his mind.

Food had been offered him; why not shelter also? He must scheme for that. Still, it would be even better if he could enter secretly after having taken leave. This might be possible. If locks had not been changed, he could find keys. He thought it probable that his old apartments stood undisturbed. They were in the upper story of an extension, over the kitchen, not the most desirable part of the house by any means, and there had always been waste spaces, guest chambers where no one ever slept. And, besides, all the furnishings were his own, the appurtenances of a bachelor, not suitable for use in other rooms.

He must contrive to be left alone. The servants would be occupied during the dinner hour, and Holbach could afford to take some liberties in a dwelling whose design he knew so well. Though the rooms might be locked, he knew how to get in, but he might not have much time for search, and so he made a special effort of the memory in order to be sure about the thing he wanted —the spare latchkey; it used to be in a little drawer of his desk. He visualized the open drawer, and there appeared to him with startling clearness not the key but the cylinder of a stylographic pen.

He had forgotten it in the whirl of rage and jealousy, though it had been so acutely present to his thoughts so little while ago. The thing had a different meaning for him now, with its deadly contents. Breath of the Devil! It became articulate, and told him what to do.

Miriam, who had been absent for some minutes, returned bringing food for him. The food was one more task—to feign hunger, to resist nausea; the woman was a means to an end. He talked with her, leading toward the questions he desired to ask; and, meanwhile, the deeper current of his thought flowed on.

If he should depart from that house in the early evening, with thanks for so much hospitality, drifting away into the city, leaving no thought in any mind that he would ever return; then, late at night, effect his secret entry, do his work, and vanish; do his work not with the noise of a pistol shot, but with something that would awake no sleeper, leave no trace?

Here was triple safety. Not only would the real Karl Holbach rest secure; the man from the sea, guest of a few hours, and gone while the household was yet astir, would never be connected with the night's tragedy, perhaps not even remembered in the face of it. Murder itself might very probably be hidden behind a veil which no eye could penetrate. The death of Werner —to the best of Holbach's knowledge— would present an aspect not to be distinguished from a failure of the heart provoked by natural causes.

"You must have suffered dreadfully on that boat," said Miriam. "Some men died, you tell me. God will punish those who do such things."

"People are punished for mistakes," Holbach remarked. "I never saw anybody get it for any other reason."

"Sin is a mistake," she responded with that freshness of conviction which the simple-minded enjoy through making their own discoveries, in ignorance of whole libraries dealing with the subject; "the greatest of mistakes. And it's always punished, even in this world."

"Sometimes not," he said with malice inspired by contempt; "if you go to another city, and start over again."

"I don't approve of that." She closed her lips firmly for a moment. "That's cowardly. I'd rather stay, and fight it out on the spot. Strength will always be given you, and peace will come at last. That is the business of our lives, as I see it; to conquer evil and attain peace—here, where our trial is, that we may deserve it in a better place."

He was profoundly occupied recalling experiments with neo-eserine, his own life being at stake, in view of what he planned to do that night; but on the surface of his mind he was amused, perceiving that Miriam looked upon him as a dying man, and was crudely trying to do him good—not for the first time, as he remembered.

"Speaking of peace," said he, "it's a mighty scarce article in the world to-day. I guess the lady upstairs could tell you that, if she's been in Belgium—or as near it as anybody can get."

"She was on Belgian soil, for a little while," said Miriam. "That was last summer. Then she fell sick, and was in England till January, when they came back here."

"She and her husband?"

"She wasn't married, then, and she didn't look as if she'd ever live to be. You wouldn't think it, to see her now; she's as well as anybody, and looks so young, just the same as when she first came from Belgium, on a visit, before the war. And I say it's her reward for what she did over there, and what she was called upon to bear. Her mother died of wounds that she got while nursing. That was near two years ago."

"So Mr. and Mrs. Werner haven't been married very long," said Holbach.

"Since March. She was married from her cousin's house, next door. We were all there, and all so glad. We hoped they'd never be parted again; but she was going back to her work."

"*Was* going?" said Holbach.

"Yes; she planned to sail this month. All her things were packed; but there's been a change in her plans, and now I don't think she'll go at all."

"Why not?"

"We haven't heard, definitely," answered Miriam, a sudden gentleness, a yearning tenderness, making her voice sweet.

"I see," said Holbach, and his burning eyes searched her face. Was this mere gossip of the servants' hall? No; the woman knew it. She was looking away, toward a religious picture on the wall, and did not notice the change in him.

He took hold upon the edge of the table with both hands, steadying himself in the chair. All that he had suffered hitherto was a trifle, a scratch of the skin; but now the blade was in his heart, cleaving the vital tissue. He felt the soul go out of him, and torturing fire leap up to meet it. If he could clutch Edmund, and drag his soul down, too, it would be useless. Edmund's life, clothed in new flesh, would remain to make a mockery of justice.

He heard a voice say, "Their child shall not be born;" and it seemed so clear that he was afraid he had spoken the words aloud. This was not true; he had uttered an inarticulate, groaning sound, no more.

"Are you ill?" Miriam asked.

"No, I thank you," he replied slowly. "A kind of a weakness comes over me, now and again, due to recent hardships. I suppose there's no place where I could stretch out, for a few minutes? Not a bed; I wouldn't ask for that. Any kind of a berth will do for me; just a bare plank."

"I'll speak to Mrs. Werner," said the woman rising. "Wait a moment."

She went out, and he heard the basement door's latch click, and knew that the maid had gone to Mrs. Bayne's house. Doubtless Alma would have come herself to see how he was entertained, but for the errand that had called her away. He hoped she would not return with Miriam; he had no wish to see her till the clamoring impulses of destruction should have learned some lesson of government.

There was a strange, unequal conflict in his breast, between crude brutality and the most delicate feeling of which he had ever been conscious. In the earliest and gentlest days of his love he would not have shrunk so sensitively from the thought of hurting Alma's flesh; vaguely he knew this, and had a horror of the opposing instinct that cursed and raved within him, shouting for indescribable cruelties.

Even the thought of her condition, her early hope of motherhood, moved him at moments to tenderness and reverence, weak voices pleading in vain, yet audible. Anarchy possessed his nature; all scoundrelism had risen finally to power, and the inconsiderable minority of good had been set in isolation, as on a scaffold, conspicuous in the instant of extinction, and speaking a last futile word over the heads of the crowd.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

THE NEW YORK BRIDGES

(Sunset, from the bridges over the East River)

THE lifted bridges are shaken
With reeling thunders of sound;
There are roofs and the river, beneath them,
And the blue-domed sky around;
There's a vast upheavel of summits
With a heaven of sunset behind,
And the cries and murmur of millions
Ascend the fugues of the wind,
And a monstrous humming and singing,
A vast orchestration of steel,
Like the roar of a wakened ocean,
From confusion of wheel on wheel,
Combines in a chant as mighty
As the primal pæan sung
By the stars and suns together
When Creation, a bridge out-flung,
Went soaring over Chaos
Where infinite Nothing stood
And the Builder tested the structure
And saw that the work was good.
Now the night begins; high over
The rolling systems glow,
And the bridges are lit with silver
Row upon twinkling row,
And sound and color and motion
Grow one in the stars' pale gleam—
And the river and roofs and millions
Seem but a Titan's dream—
The dream of a sleeping Titan—
To fade, as he stirs awake,
When Creation, a floating bubble,
Will strike on nothing and break!

HARRY KEMP.

The Master of the Mercenaries

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "Norroy—Diplomatic Agent," "The Black Book," Etc.

I.—THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE

WHEN they found Faience lying dead one morning in the courtyard of his own high house, so-called by the Chinese thereabouts, nobody was surprised. Had not everybody said it would happen some day if Faience persisted in that queer habit of picking up a derelict on the Bund almost every night, taking him home, giving him bed and board, and a bright new Mexican dollar in the morning?

He had been doing it for years, and for years; the white men of Canton had been prophesying that some day one of these no-good beach combers would be the death of him. And now one had. There he lay on the stones of the courtyard, a fall of forty feet from the open window above. Not even those who had known him well could recognize him.

In the room from which he had fallen everything was overturned evidently by one in a desperate hurry, but anxious to overlook nothing of value that was portable as well. Never was there a plainer killing for the sake of loot.

Every one said afterward how fortunate it was that Strangitharm was in Canton and so near the spot when Faience's death was discovered. On hearing of it, he had straightway sent the Eurasian *mafoo* with whom he had been at early morning polo practice, to fetch Sir Richard Haight, high commissioner of the imperial maritime customs, begging him if he could not come immediately himself at least to keep the bungling police away until he, Strangitharm, had had a chance.

Which, in the light of what happened afterward was, every one agreed, the only earthly thing to do!

Sir Richard had brought Strangitharm to the Shameen. No one else knew so much as his name; only that he had come up with the high commissioner from Hongkong, and had spent a week or so mooning about the little island where the white men live, or losing himself in the mazes of Canton. Once he had gone back to Hongkong, returning overnight. What they did not know was that he and Sir Richard had spent hours behind closed shutters, locked doors, and drawn blinds; that thus closeted they had straightened out books an expert accountant would have despaired of. Had they known, it would have surprised every one, for, if anything, Strangitharm seemed rather an ass!

Nevertheless, the high commissioner had speedily complied with both of his behests of that particular morning. After notifying the beefy-faced head constable "Hands off," he had hurried to where the dead man lay. Strangitharm was already there, silent since his entrance, a big man with a bushy beard, still in the polo-player's outfit, in which the news had found him. Not until now had he thought to remove even the white doeskin gauntlets that matched his riding breeches.

Nodding to him, Sir Richard crossed to where the dead man lay. The early, brilliant sunshine of a bright morning bathed the body, but young Dabney, a horror-stricken youngster who had found it, and who was in the uniform of the outdoor customs, had caught up a flaming scarlet scarf and flung it where the face had been.

That room was like anything except a chamber of death; a tower high above the other houses overlooking everything alive, and open four-square to the winds of the world.

The great, slanting north-light window overlooked an embankment raised above the river, that white asphalt coast line of the island, that folks call the "Bund." Through a second slanting window that matched and met the first in mid-air, making a sort of glass gable, one got glances of a wondrous garden at the rear, all green and gold with dwarfed orange trees and their gleaming

golden fruit set in green tubs, and flaming yellow flowers everywhere against a hedge of emerald evergreens.

Young Dabney had been telling about how he had found the body—how it had seemed to rise up at him out of the early morning mists—how queerly the limbs had been contorted so that the body looked like some dreadful monster of a bug, its tentacles clawing the courtyard stones—how—then, Hughes had come along—for these customs "watchers" were the earliest to be up and about the Shameen. , How they had carried it up to this very room where, every night since they had been on the Shameen, they had seen the dead man at the windows watching; watching—for what?

But when Sir Richard's head appeared at the head of the stairway of ornamental iron that wound its way up outside, the route by which the body had been brought, both boys had fallen as silent as Strangitharm. Sir Richard was by way of being their czar.

The high commissioner of the imperial maritime customs was of the type known best to the world nowadays in Bedford cords, a Sam Browne belt, and a row or two of ribands on the left breast. It was before the days of that uniform that Sir Richard Haight, K. C. B., K. C. M. G.—and many other things besides—had been put in supreme command of the imperial maritime customs; the same having been taken away from China to yield the Allies what she owed for Boxer outrages. Since then he had remained at China's own request. Canton was not his habitat; Peking was supposed to be; but he was eternally on the prowl.

"Well, Strangitharm, glad to see you here. Right in your line, this. Fortunate to find you first. Go ahead, Elkins."

Behind Sir Richard was another, ostensibly a noncommissioned man. This person had made straight for the wall safe. Evidently its exact location was known to him for all it was hidden so artfully behind one of many panels of watered silk that covered the walls. As its combination was written down in his bulky notebook, he required but a moment to discover that what he sought was missing. The hushed silence during which he shook his head aroused Sir Richard to a realization of the calamity of Faience's death.

"Not there? Strange! Fifty thousand taels vanished into thin air? Take my sampan to headquarters. Examine the safe and everything else in Mr. Faience's room. Hurry! Strangitharm," Sir Richard called him closer, his tone low, "this is serious."

The silent one whispered. Sir Richard turned sharply.

"Who found him? You? Dabney? Tell me about it."

The outdoors customs men are of all sorts. Dabney's salute was different from that of Elkins'.

"There was nobody about, Sir Richard. It was as dark and as quiet as it generally is when we report for duty. Around dawn, you know. The stars were still out so I couldn't see much. There was a heavy mist from the river, too. Not a sign of any one, not a footstep or the splash of a sampan oar—you know, sir, how open everything is on the Bund. Well, the minute I saw Mr. Faience was dead, I climbed a coping, and used these——"

He slapped a pair of binoculars, in a leather case swung over his shoulders, shaking his head meanwhile.

"Nothing! Nobody! And not a sound except Hughes coming after me and stumbling over *it*, too. Then I turned his face—didn't I, Hughes?"

"You did," answered the little cockney Australian with what might have seemed unnecessary emphasis.

"And I remembered reading something in some story, and I looked him over to see by his watch, which should have stopped, what time he had fallen. But there wasn't any watch or any money, either, or anything of any value, except the jade ring on his hand, the big one he always wore. So when Svenson rolled up, we three carried him upstairs by that stairway you just came by. Then I sent Svenson to tell the harbor master what had happened. Mr. Strangitharm met him and sent for you. And that's all I know, sir."

Sir Richard nodded abstractedly, and, turning to Strangitharm, said something in a low tone. In a whisper, lower, if possible, than the only tone any one there had ever heard him use, Strangitharm answered him, and the executive turned to his subordinate again.

"Have you any theory as to how it happened?"

"Well," returned Dabney reflectively, "we've seen Mr. Faience at that window

there, time after time, when we were coming home from the Customs Club at midnight or going to work at dawn. Now you know how everybody strolls the Bund at night, especially the beach combers, the derelicts, the fellows out of pocket and out of a job who sit about on the benches all night?"

Sir Richard nodded. Strangitharm moved closer.

"Well," continued Dabney, "not once or twice, but half a dozen times, I've seen Mr. Faience talking to such fellows or bringing them back here to the high house. One night there wasn't a light on the island except his when I came ashore from a sampan, and there he was on a bench telling a big burly brute he should have all the food he wanted and a decent bed for the night. I drew the old fellow aside——"

"*Old* fellow," exploded Sir Richard, "Faience wasn't fifty."

"Well, Sir Richard, he *looked* old; teeth gone, no hair to speak of, except on his face, and that all gray, and his clothes old-fashioned and everything—he looked old, anyhow," returned Dabney defensively. "So as I was saying, I said: 'Mr. Faience, aren't you afraid that big brute'll rob or murder you or something?' He only frowned and told me a man might be unfortunate without being criminal.

"And I said, so he might, but also so he might not. Now there were two men here last night, Sir Richard. Mr. Strangitharm will tell you that: I saw that he noticed what I did the minute he came in. See?"

Daintily, almost gingerly, Dabney lifted from the floor a pea jacket and a pair of baggy trousers.

"These never belonged to Mr. Faience," said he with a fine air of finality. "I can see Mr. Strangitharm thinks the same."

Strangitharm nodded, then coming closer to Sir Richard, drew him away.

"Obviously there was another person here, sir," he said in his usual husky whisper, beckoning Dabney to draw near also. "A sailor, perhaps, although these are also the sort of clothes a Victoria Road dealer gives along with extra money, to boot, when a man is down to his last decent European suit, the last thing he has to sell. This is probably so in this case for these clothes are a bit too clean and well-brushed for one with only one rig who makes a habit of sleeping on benches and the like. These have been cleaned and brushed only recently. Besides, the man retained his undergarments—judging from their absence from this heap. Now, since he might have had fresh, new ones, they must have been clean and whole at least.

Strangitharm had been picking up, one after the other, pea jacket, jersey, trousers, and shoes. The latter, big coarse brogans, he now investigated, plucking forth a quantity of wadding from each toe.

Again he whispered to Sir Richard and his subordinate:

"You see the shoes weren't small enough for him. Therefore, he couldn't have had the kind of foot you'd expect from the size of these garments if they'd been worn by an ordinary man. And, although there is nothing about the clothes to identify him, and nothing in the pockets except these"—he held up two handkerchiefs, one soiled, one clean—"you must agree the ordinary type of beach-combing burglar that sleeps on benches doesn't carry such gear."

"All this goes to show my theory is pretty nearly right," said Dabney, coming forward again. "Doesn't it, sir?"

Again he addressed Strangitharm. Again Strangitharm nodded.

"You haven't given *any* theory yet," snapped Sir Richard.

"By inference, I have, sir. He was murdered by some man he brought up here to give a square meal to, and a place to sleep. There's the meal on the tray—Mr. Strangitharm has had the cover off. There's the whole place ransacked, drawers turned inside out. There's the clothes left behind. And," Dabney pointed dramatically to the body and the face covered with the scarlet scarf; "there's Mr. Faience pushed from this very window——"

If Dabney and his fellow watcher had been unpleasantly astounded, once before that morning, they were as equally startled as at finding Faience's body, when Strangitharm burst out suddenly in a voice, a cross between a deep bass and high head tones, the changing voice of a hobbledehoy of fifteen:

"How do you know that body is Faience's?"

In Strangitharm's case, some complexity of larynx, throat or tonsils had, for a decade or more, kept his voice in the transitory stage of adolescence. Dabney no longer wondered, now that he had heard him when

he forgot to whisper, why so young a man had allowed beard and mustache to run riot. By the time the doctors pronounced this state of voice incurable Strangitharm had had too much proof that it aroused unenviable emotions in others when possessed by a clean-shaven, personable young man, whose face matched his slender figure. So he had chosen a sailing ship to come to China on. Those weeks of slow passage across the Pacific had given his beard time to grow. His life, always solitary since this misfortune had befallen him, had trained his brain to a combination of circumspection and correlation that he had been able to put to immense advantage when a killing had occurred aboard his ship. Its reason and its perpetrator had been parts of a seemingly impenetrable mystery to all save Strangitharm, who, with a very slight expenditure of trouble, had provided proofs that delivered the murderer to justice.

Thus, accidentally, had his own profession been determined for him. The matter necessitating his remaining in Hongkong to give evidence, and the tale coming to the ears of Sir Richard, that astute gentleman, aghast over certain unexplainable fiscal frauds at Canton, had requested Mr. Strangitharm to call upon him.

Strangitharm, amazed to find he had a market value, had gladly come Cantonward two weeks before to familiarize himself with the fiscal frauds aforesaid, whose author he was here to discover.

Which last fact had something to do with his request that he be informed as to how Dabney knew the dead man to be Bertram Oswald Dorrington-Faience, architect and owner of the high house, painter, pianist, player upon the lute, chemist, alchemist—and most particularly paymaster of the imperial Chinese maritime customs at Canton.

II.

Had there been no hair to hide most of his face, Strangitharm's relapse into tones so ridiculous, especially in one so hirsute and so stalwart, would have shown it deeply encrimsoned. He finished what he had to say, but it was in his usual husky whisper, which only Hughes could not hear:

"His face is absolutely unidentifiable, you observed that, Dabney, didn't you? Not a pretty sight—but—er—you, too, Sir Richard, look! And tell me if features could be so completely obliterated by a mere fall? Crushed, yes, as it was, no doubt. But not —but—look!"

Their reluctance equaled their obedience, but the highest as well as one of the lowest in the imperial customs obeyed.

"Closer, please," Strangitharm whispered huskily, setting the example by bending over the upturned horror.

As slowly as he had drawn it away Strangitharm allowed the scarf to fall into place.

"Well?"

"Well, my boy, there—there's no trace of—er—blows, is there?" Sir Richard hesitated.

"No *blows,*" Strangitharm whispered. "But remember the odor when we bent over him?"

The brisk breeze of that bright spring morning had obligingly lifted the tinkling curtain of threaded beads and bits of polished bamboo toward which Strangitharm was pointing. It revealed an alcove whose shelves held many of the queerly blown glass bubbles experimental chemists use as well as many strangely squat bottles containing liquids as brightly colored as the peacock blues and coral reds of the beaded curtain that fell back into place a second later and again hid them from their sight.

Strangitharm's lips came close to the high commissioner's ear:

"The chemical used to obliterate all identifying traces is in one of those bottles: a lot of it. If that *is* Faience—why?"

As he spoke, he drew young Dabney closer.

"I will use him to help me, if I may," he whispered, a hand still on the boy's shoulder.

It was then that Elkins reëntered. His lugubrious look made it unnecessary for him to say his search had come to nothing. Strangitharm nodded impatiently as at a twice-told tale, and gave Elkins whispered orders:

"Keep close to this fellow, Hughes," he said, pointing to the Australian who had long since withdrawn to the window at the rear where he stared dully down at the emerald-green garden with its flowers of flaming yellow. "He's all right, but I don't want him talking too much. All you need to know, and him, too, is that Faience is supposed to have been killed by some stranger. Tell everybody that, see that Hughes says so, too. If he wants a drink, buy it for him.

Luncheon, too; only see you stay with him. Get him off now."

He gave Elkins a handful of Chinese dollars. Not until the two had withdrawn did Strangitharm speak again.

"Understand, Dabney, you are the only one, beside ourselves, who knows that Faience did not die by his own act. No one else *must* know until everything is arranged that——"

He turned to Sir Richard. "Elkins expected to find there"—he pointed to the wall safe—"the fifty thousand taels Faience was to have taken down to Hongkong to-day to adjust the monthly Victoria accounts, as he has been doing for the past year or so, isn't that it? As soon as you heard Faience was murdered, you wondered about that fifty thousand, didn't you? So did I?"

Strangitharm's face set grimly. Then, at the sound of footsteps on the outside stairway, he made a sudden sign of silence. At the cessation of their voices, and as they heard the footsteps, too, Strangitharm leaned over and whispered swift instructions to Dabney. Nodding, that ready-witted youth immediately began an address apparently to nobody in particular, and in what the intensely astonished Sir Richard considered an unnecessarily loud voice.

"For the benefit of whoever's coming up now," came to Sir Richard in Strangitharm's swift whisper. An urgent, sudden pressure of his arm followed as there appeared at the top of the stairway looking at them through the open French windows the most gorgeous-looking young man any of them had ever seen.

Dabney continued as if he had not seen the stranger:

"I knew it was poor Mr. Faience the minute I saw that big jade ring on his finger. He always wore it. It's a wonder the robber didn't take that, too. It's valuable enough. Didn't notice it, I dare say, or else if——"

He was interrupted by a voice strange to all of them.

III.

"I am Newboldt Newman," said the voice vibrant with emotion. "I heard my friend, Mr. Faience, had had an accident. May I be allowed to help?"

Everything about the stranger seemed in accord with his brown lounge suit which was of a sort seldom seen on the Chinese coast. His brown boots, brown pongee shirt and collar, and the rich brown tie pinned with the brownest of cinnamon diamonds, were perfect. His furry hat brown, too, was of beaver of a certain sort turned out by a certain shop in the Place Vendome, famous for furnishing visiting royalty with singularly becoming headgear.

Its wearer, who stood framed in the open French windows, one brown gloved hand holding a polished Malacca cane that tapered from a slim gold head to a slim steel tip, held between the fingers of the other the fattest, most expensive Egyptian cigarette purchasable. As he advanced, he clicked this between two rows of perfect white teeth, and took a card from a slim, golden case. His hair proved to be as glossy and as brown as the hat that was raised revealing it when he put the card into Sir Richard's hands.

It was only when their eyes met that the high commissioner had a disquieting sense of familiarity. Somehow, it seemed, he had seen those eyes before. But a second glance convinced him he could never have known so vivid a butterfly-man and ever have forgotten him. His eyes dropped to the card.

A. NEWBOLDT NEWMAN, F. R. G. S.,

Authors' League,	*Authors' Club,*
Gramercy Park,	Whitehall Court,
New York.	London.

"Mr. Faience has been my valued friend by correspondence these five years," said the stranger, whose fresh, unwrinkled skin and eager eyes made it difficult to set his age much above the middle twenties. "I met him in the flesh only a few days ago, but we were so mutually interested in Ming porcelains—my monographs on these are considered authoritative—that I became sincerely attached to him. When I heard just now that he had had an accident——"

Strangitharm had maneuvered himself so that his whisper to Dabney went unobserved by the stranger.

"From whom did you hear about the accident?" asked Dabney abruptly.

"Indirectly, sir, from two men whom I had seen at a distance descending this outside stairway. As that was the way I had been brought here by Mr. Faience, I was sufficiently interested to listen to their conversation. Is the accident serious?"

Strangitharm now stood blocking the way between the stranger and the body. Still obeying whispered orders, Dabney moved a screen that blocked the stranger's view of it, and advanced, addressing him.

"Not as serious as was first believed," said the young customs man uneasily. He wished he knew what this strange Strangitharm was up to; what these queer orders meant. "This gentleman—the doctor"—he indicated Strangitharm who had plumped himself down on his knees beside the body just as the light screen was moved to completely bar it from the stranger's sight, "has hopes that Mr. Faience will speak again if only for a few moments. He is about to administer a drug so powerful in its effect on the heart that the slight flicker of life that still exists may be fanned into a sudden flame."

Strangitharm, mentally approving his new assistant's mental alertness and the consternation of the stranger at his answer, peered through one of the joints of the screen as he heard the long pointed ferule of the Malacca cane thud to the floor. The stranger's fingers had tightened about the gold head. Also under orders, Sir Richard steered an apparently aimless course toward the French windows.

The stranger's exclamation should have fully explained his mental perturbation. Strangitharm did not seem to think it did, however, if one might judge by his ironic smile.

"You mean the accident is serious?—that Faience is likely to die?" stammered Newman.

"What was it you heard the men say?" asked young Dabney. He was uneasy without Strangitharm's whisper in his ear, and he had only the sketchiest of orders to carry out. It would have been easier had he some idea of who this stranger was, and what he was doing there. Dabney was inclined to consider him rather attractive if anything. His attire, especially. It seemed like a direct message from Romano's, the Savoy Bar, the Gaiety Theater, and the Piccadilly supper clubs—all the unchanging night life of London that young Britishers of Dabney's age and inclinations yearn for when far removed therefrom.

"I heard something said about a fall from a window—some hint of foul play," the stranger continued in the same uneasy tone.

He could not have known when he purchased that cane what an index to his emotions it would prove. With its sharp ferule hard against the floor, the thin rattan responded to the slightest movement of his gloved hand—his right, that hand upon which every emotion has a reflex action.

Now, as Sir Richard joined Strangitharm behind the screen in obedience to a beckoning finger, the rattan was so bent that, had it been suddenly released, it would have flown across the room.

"He is likely to regain consciousness?" asked the stranger nervously.

Sir Richard reappeared almost instantly. While behind the screen, he had been handed a page from Strangitharm's notebook. It contained certain scribblings that by a tour de force of memory during the following moment he had converted into an accurate mental film. He now proceeded to obey its instructions.

"Presently, my dear sir," he said as he came, copying his subordinate's suavity. "True, we cannot hope for more than a conscious moment from poor Faience. But even that——"

He paused. Flicking through the open window the notebook page, now a tightly rolled ball, he quoted from it exactly:

"Even a single conscious moment will be sufficient for him to recognize his friends."

Through the interstices of the sectional screen, Strangitharm saw Newman's cane bend like a bow when an arrow is drawn to its head.

"I had no idea he could be—wasn't—was, I mean—was as bad as all that," he muttered. Somehow he did not seem to be so very young now. The eager light had gone out of his eyes leaving them very old. As he drew near the exit to the outside stairway, both Dabney and Sir Richard moved unostentatiously in that direction also.

But before Newman had time to notice their interest in his movements, all eyes were turned in the direction of the screen. Fearful lest a mere detail divert attention from the experiment in psychology he planned, Strangitharm burst from behind the screen.

"Faience is alive, about to speak. It can only last a second or so. Come, Mr. Newman; you, too—here!"

His husky whisper was excited, urgent.

Sir Richard caught one of the stranger's arms, Dabney the other. A sudden change came over Newman's face.

"No! No!" he cried, resisting them violently, throwing all his weight upon the smart flat heels of his perfect brown boots. "No! No! I couldn't stand it. No! No!"

"Hurry," urged that weird whisper over Strangitharm's shoulder as he disappeared again behind the screen. "Hurry, hurry! He is speaking now. Come—quick!"

The stranger still resisted them, hanging his weight upon his heels. Together Sir Richard and Dabney forced him within a few feet of the screen. All the while he protested and fought to be free.

Before they could bring him nearer, Strangitharm's grave eyes surveyed them a second time from behind the screen.

"It is all over," he wheezed in his familiar low whisper. "But Faience *has* spoken. In that brief moment of consciousness, in twenty broken words, he told an amazing, an incredible tale."

"What was it?" asked young Dabney, eager, amazed, forgetting that this affair was staged entirely for the stranger's benefit and that dead men do not speak at all. But the affair had gone beyond Dabney; beyond Sir Richard, too, As for the stranger, it was apparent that what had seemed the bloom of youth on his cheeks was from the same sort of receptacle that women use for such rejuvenation, albeit laid on with more skill than is usual with them. His cheeks continued to glow but the remainder of his face was chalky. As for the rattan, it was once more like a bow whose string was about to twang.

"Sit here," whispered Strangitharm and drew chairs up to a little lacquered table, close to the screen. Sir Richard and Dabney obeyed wonderingly. The man who called himself Newman would have refused had he dared. As it was, he sat with such unwillingness and cast so oblique a glance at the two exits from the room, that it was apparent he would have quitted it had he the opportunity. He must be watched if they were to keep him there.

Strangitharm had so arranged it that, as they sat, each face was within a few inches of the other. His lowest whisper could thus be heard by all. It was apparent from their positions that he meant to ask questions. The stranger shifted uneasily in his chair.

"You knew Faience?" Strangitharm asked, turning to him abruptly.

IV.

The man's youth was a thing of the past now. Not only was his complexion seen to be a subterfuge and his eyes old, but the muscles of his face seemed to sag. The rattan lay across his knees, the weight of his clenched hands bearing it down on either side as he gripped it tightly.

He cleared his throat.

"Yes, I knew Mr. Faience. For a few years by correspondence, for a few days in the flesh. I came here yesterday. You will find me registered, then, at the Victoria Hotel."

"That makes only one day you knew Faience—in the flesh, as you say?"

The man's natural flush overspread that of the cosmetics. "I saw him for several days in Hongkong a month ago."

"I see. Now what time did you register at the Victoria—here?"

"At eight o'clock, last night. Why——"

"Nothing except that the last Hongkong boat is in at six. What was the idea of the delay? How did you spend the intervening hours?"

The man hesitated before answering, then replied with a certain bravado, and a hard laugh:

"I came here to see Faience first. He invited me to stay with him, but I had already written the hotel to reserve me rooms. You don't think *I* killed Faience, do you?"

Strangitharm shook his head.

"I *know* you didn't kill Faience. Just answer my questions, please, even if they seem absurd. What sort of a man *was* Faience?"

"An old man," said the other eagerly. "A very old and dirty, very untidy man. I was surprised at seeing him; his handwriting had led me to expect one quite different: it was pointed, delicate. He was toothless and hairless, too, except that on his face which was a dirty sort of gray. His clothes looked as though they had been slept in. To see his letters, or hear him talk in the dark—he had that cultivated sort of English university voice we Americans envy and imitate without success—you would have imagined he was a middle-aged man well set up and well dressed. Something like S—this gentleman here——"

He indicated Sir Richard.

"Did you know him, sir? If so you can bear me out."

Sir Richard frowned. "He was not so very old in years. He aged very quickly in appearance, however. When last I was here, just after he was sent out from England, and when I initiated him into office, he was aging, but he was not *old*. Evidently he let himself go; for when I came back this time, he was both toothless and hairless, and as Mr. Newman says, gave an appearance of extreme age."

"The body does not," whispered Strangitharm.

Newman started. "You mean it isn't bald, isn't——"

"There is some indication of baldness at the rear of the skull. But one cannot be sure. There is no way of identifying the face nor the upper portion of the head. No mere fall could have produced this unless Faience, when he *did* fall, came face downward into a pool of disfiguring acid. There is no such pool below, else the man who turned his face would have had fingers as badly burned as the dead man's face. Show your fingers, Dabney."

The young customs man held up two uninjured hands.

"The theory is," pursued Strangitharm, "that Faience brought the unknown murderer home, fed him, and was pushed from the window by him. All evidence points to that. Faience's passion for feeding strays and derelicts——"

"I can testify to that," broke in Newman, "for even while I sat here last evening he left this room twice to turn several unfortunates over to his Chinese servants across the courtyard——"

"Quite so," agreed Strangitharm. "The practice was known to every one in Shanghai. The open drawers, the rifled contents, and so forth, all indicate robbery as the motive for the murder. But one or two points remain unexplained. Why did the murderer, after pushing Faience from the window and killing him, paint his face with corrosive acid? Without knowing the combination of the safe and without forcibly opening it, how did the murderer manage to remove the sum of fifty thousand taels in gold and notes which Faience, as pay master and disbursing officer, took from his safe at the customs last night? He has been doing that each month for several years, for the early boat for Hongkong leaves before his office is open, and unless he took that boat he took none that day."

"He told me something of it—said he was in the habit of thus adjusting cash accounts with Hongkong each month, and said if I was returning at that time, he would be glad of my company. He was very nervous of robbers," added Newman fluently, as one on firm conversational ground again.

"Quite so. But why should the murderer obliterate all traces of identity from Mr. Faience's face——"

Strangitharm was leaning forward now, palms on knees, his eyes within an inch of Newman's. The latter, however, met his gaze better than unflinchingly. He seemed oblivious of the other's searching eyes: his own seemed merely troubled, and he paused in great perplexity before answering.

"I give it up," he said finally. "It is too much for me. But then any brute who could kill a stranger who had just fed and clothed him might do anything. There is said to be a degenerate pleasure in mutilating the dead."

"But that is elemental savagery," objected Strangitharm, "tearing, rending. This was simply painting the face, as you might your own except that this was with corrosive acid. But even if we leave that detail, here's another puzzle." He paused. "How could the thief have entered that safe without the combination. It is unlikely Faieice had it written down anywhere. And no force was used, certainly."

"If you'll pardon me," objected the stranger eagerly, "that seems simple enough to me. Evidently the robber forced Mr. Faience to tell him the number of the combination."

"Is it likely that Faience would have turned his back while he was being robbed so that the robber could conveniently push him from the window. For there was no struggle. Anyhow, why should the robber kill him if he had everything he wanted without it? Both facts make it extremely unlikely that Faience gave him the combination. No! those cocks won't fight. Only one explanation remains?"

"And that is?" asked the stranger, wetting dry lips.

But Strangitharm only turned to Sir Richard:

"Faience was a great cigarette smoker, wasn't he?"

The high commissioner nodded; Newman's eyes again took on the troubled look that had momentarily disappeared while he

sought to explain the mystery of the opened safe.

"There are no pipes here, and if a man smokes a pipe he always has more than one scattered about, even a pipe-rack full. Faience had none. Under such circumstances, this is a strange thing——"

Strangitharm laid down a French brier, blackened from much use, its contents only half consumed and loose in the bowl as if used but recently.

"To find in the murderer's clothes. A pipe whose teeth marks exactly match the marks on the two upper teeth and three lower teeth, all broken in a peculiar manner, that remain in the dead man's mouth. Not only did Faience not smoke a pipe, or own one, but he was toothless and subsisted on soft things."

"And this—the dead man—is he not toothless?" exclaimed Newman, the rattan again bent bowllike over his knees.

"Apparently—from the front—he is. But there are the five teeth I have described in his left jaw, and from the indentations on the pipe-stem, this has been held by such teeth. I have carefully compared the pipe marks with those on this."

He placed beside the pipe a mold of plaster of Paris, a handful of which Dabney had seen him pick up from the sink in the alcove. Strangitharm had evidently employed part of his time behind the screen in taking an impression of the oddly broken teeth. The marks on the pipe stem were identical.

"I can understand that the dead man might seem to have been toothless," Strangitharm pursued in his husky whisper. "Because of his extremely long upper lip, these teeth would not show when he talked or even when he smiled. Now, to go on, Faience smoked only cigarettes. Scattered about this studio are tins of various kinds, English, American, Egyptian, Virginia—but chiefly Virginia. Such cigarettes leave a very noticeable stain on the inside of the two fingers that hold them, the index and forefingers of the right hand. In the case of a heavy smoker both hands."

He paused, pointing to the screen.

"Observe the fingers of the man who lies there. There is not a cigarette stain on any finger. That man smoked a pipe. When he could afford it, cigars."

There was a sudden sound: the thin rattan had snapped in two pieces, one in each of Newman's hands. None noticed it save Strangitharm: he held the others breathless now.

"Only one more thing, and I leave the arrest of the criminal to you. Faience had the hands of the artist—must have had; look: painting, music, dabbling in clay, experiments in alchemy. Such a man would have long, slender fingers that bend backward to a point when the hand is closed. The fingers of the man who lies there are those of an unimaginative man—short and thick, a broad hand with stubby spatulate finger tips. The hand of Faience was like this one——"

He held up his own. "Or that." And suddenly he caught Newman's. "And there," he added, his voice rising high, "there is a print of it."

He pointed to the French window from which the dead man had fallen, one side open, the other shut. Newman sprang to his feet in an effort to release his wrist. But still holding to it with one hand, Strangitharm continued to point with the other.

"There—on the middle pane. Look at it, Sir Richard—the complete palm of the murderer. His weight rested against that when his other palm suddenly launched the man who lies there to his death."

Sir Richard was on his feet and across the room, examining it, Dabney, too. Newman stood aghast, for the moment stricken motionless.

"Sit down," said Strangitharm. "Come back, Sir Richard. You have seen it, too, Dabney? It is a perfect print, is it not?"

They nodded, looking at him strangely.

"But what does it mean?"

"That is a print of the murderer's hand —Faience's hand."

V.

Newman started to his feet again, but once more Strangitharm seated him with a pressure none too gentle.

"But the man who lies there?" cried Dabney.

"Is not Faience, but some one whom he brought here. He had brought many others in the past year or so, always hoping to find one who would sufficiently resemble him in death to give the idea that he had been murdered and robbed."

He turned to address Sir Richard.

"For years Faience has been quietly falsifying his books. Lately he grew greedy and

you brought me here to investigate. My proofs were only a matter of days. Although Faience never saw me, he somehow got wind of the fact that investigations were going on, knew the time had come to go. Especially propitious was the morning when he carried the monthly cash exchange to Hongkong. For some time he had been getting ready to make his exit. But it must be without suspicion so that he might be able to enjoy his stolen wealth at leisure. So he began to plan it all out years ago. But no one can be so careful in his planning that he does not leave traces to the trained eye. Fortunately, there was such an eye fixed on him at this particular time, otherwise all would have gone well for him."

Strangitharm turned, addressing Newman who was keeping outwardly calm only by great internal stress. He managed, somehow, a sickly imitation of a smile of interest.

"Consider his artfulness," Strangitharm continued in his hoarsest, huskiest tones. "He has taken the excuse of the holiday it gives him to carry those funds monthly to Hongkong for the past year or so, a job ordinarily relegated to a less important person. He has let every one on the Shameen into the secret of his benevolence to strays and derelicts, his housing of them for the night. For he realized, when that dead body was found, people would say just as young Dabney has said: 'I warned him, poor fellow,' Artful man, indeed!

"When I began to suspect Faience was misappropriating funds, I returned to Hongkong to investigate these monthly trips. He had visited nobody but dentists, surgeons, wig-makers, and a London tailor's agents, nothing in itself suspicious. When I remembered that Faience was toothless, bald, and untidy, and, returning, found him as usual, I had a moment's wonder. Then I wired the proper officials to find out what doctors, dentists, and tailors had done for him."

That Newman wanted no more of a tale that both shocked and terrified him was plain for all to see from the sweat that beaded his forehead, the nausea that was the cause of his quivering lips.

"The lavatory," he mumbled out of a dry mouth. "If I might be excused for the moment. A glass of water—a——"

But Strangitharm held him to his place in the grip of a gorilla. The lavatory led to another stairway, from there to an inner labyrinth, one exit from which led to the garden below. And there were many others.

"One moment——"

"I must go, I tell you——"

"Why was it you feared to look when you thought the dead man was alive, even for a moment," demanded Strangitharm in his shrilly head tones.

"Shall I tell you why?" he whispered, and the color ebbed out of Newman's cheeks until the skin looked leathery. "Would you like to know why I told these others to tell you that the dead man was alive, too? It was so that I might watch your face go gray with terror. That was why."

The broken bits of rattan fell from the stranger's hands as he put them up to hide a face full of sick protest. Suddenly the palms were outstretched as Strangitharm's sudden seizure of him whirled him about and sent him stumbling toward the window. The next second showed the prints of those palms plain in the sunlight where they had met the pane in an effort to break his fall.

"Compare them," cried Strangitharm. "The print of the murderer's is on the pane below."

Before Newman's hands could slide up to smear out his own perfect prints, a push sent him sprawling.

"Compare the two right hands," came in Strangitharm's hoarse whisper—"the murderer's and this man's."

As he spoke Strangitharm, with two movements so sudden and unexpected that they met with no resistance, plucked from the head of the man on the floor a brown wig, from his gaping mouth a perfect set of false teeth.

"Look at him now. There——"

Strangitharm was pointing to the naked scalp of one perfectly bald. Below the ears were the clean-cut scars of a master surgeon's making.

"Sufficient skin severed from sagging cheeks leaves what remains elastic, the first requisite to a semblance of youth," whispered Strangitharm. "The rest is a matter of cosmetics and massage. Come.

"There are the master properties," he said, "the minor ones furnished by tailor and haberdasher are still on his back. Faience laid all these in and kept them by him until the time should come until he should find a man to kill who was near enough like him

in everything except his face. He figured on the fall destroying enough of this to make the disfigurement seem natural. Meanwhile, he must have painted his own face back to a sagging semblance of what it was before the surgeon operated; must have done all that was possible to accentuate his age, his bald head, toothless gums, unbrushed clothes, and unbathed person. Just as he saw to it that every one on the Shameen had warned him at least once that one of the strays he was always picking up at night would murder him. During the years he has planned this, he has been stealing systematically. At falsifying his books he is a greater expert than any except the most expert accountant could be—and China doesn't throng with expert accountants."

He nodded to Sir Hugh.

"Fortunately," said the stupefied Sir Richard, "I found you. But I never suspected *him*——"

"Nor did I—at first. His private life was blameless. Everything pointed the other way; his chapel going, his kindness to the poor, his diligence at his work. It was not until the day I slipped up here after making sure he would be at his office and saw the books on those shelves."

He pointed to many old and tattered volumes, the works of the Rosicrucians—of Albertus Magnus—Riamunda Lully—Friar Bacon—old Hermes Trismegistus—biographies and tales concerning such as Cagliostro and the Comte de St. Germain.

"When I saw represented every seeker after the elixir of life—the fountain of youth—saw those alchemists' crucibles and alembics in his laboratory, I began to have a linking disquietude. But even so, his own murder of this morning was so cleverly faked, I would not have correlated it with what I had seen, but for the amount of money stolen without the thief opening the safe feloniously. It was by that flash of light that I saw this gorgeously 'young' stranger. Faience had overdone it. Everything was *too* new! Fools call that intuition instead of what it really is; instant correlation. I suspected him *because* of his unlikeness to himself in everything that *could be* changed. As for his coming here, Faience was unable to restrain his desire to see how cleverly he had taken us all in. Look out!—Dabney!—quick!"

But Strangitharm's cry came too late. All the while he had talked, the man on the floor had sidled nearer the window. Now with one wild spring the real Faience played the same tragic part he had forced upon the false one.

When they found him beneath the same window, there could be no doubt this time that Faience was really dead.

"Sable Wings" is the title of the next story in this series.

VICTIM OF THE "FLU"

AT the height of the influenza epidemic, one of Doctor Lewis' friends caught it and died. Lewis, deeply distressed by the death, dropped into his club late that night for a quick meal.

"So Bob's dead?" another of the dead man's friends asked the doctor.

"Yes."

"The 'flu' got him?"

"Yes!" snapped the doctor, weary and irritable.

"Well, well! Too bad. So the 'flu' got him, did it?"

The doctor continued his meal.

"Tough! Tough!" lamented the friend. "And the 'flu' really got him?"

"See here!" thundered the doctor, throwing down his knife and fork. "What are you trying to do—make me confess murder?"

Look for "THE GLYPHS," *by Roy Norton*

The complete novel in the September 20th issue of the POPULAR

A Chat With You

SOMETIMES the mind wearies a little with European affairs. We know that whatever the duties, whatever the obligations of the United States may be as to the rest of this troubled world, they will be carried out honestly and generously; but at the same time, the mind wants to turn back home and dwell on things American.

Almost every one living in any of our big cities in the East has been fed up on European affairs. Our newspapers were formerly accused of provincialism, but such a charge is valid no longer. The bills for cable tolls on the big papers are staggering and every general magazine is choked with informative material on European affairs and conditions. If we read all that is presented to us we ought to be authorities on Russian politics, on the state of Jugo-Slavia, on the position and geography of Poland, on the future of the Czecho-Slovaks, on the real inwardness of the Fiume matter, and on the question of French mandateries in the neighborhood of the Tigris and Euphrates.

ALL these are interesting and important questions, but the extremely pertinent question naturally arises: "What's the matter with America as a place to talk about and write about?" Here's where we live. Here's where some considerable millions of Europeans would like to live. Judging from the tone adopted by a great many of those who left our shores to take a hand in the late unpleasantness, it is the one place superlatively worth living in at the present writing.

SOMEBODY said in our hearing once that Kipling had done more to create and solidify the British Empire than the British army and navy put together. Just one Anglo-Indian, with observant eyes, with literary gifts, and with a strong and abiding enthusiasm for the empire and people he represents in literature. No matter who is officially designated, he is the real laureate, press agent, advertising man, and general booster. He is the ablest literary patriot since Vergil. They ought to have a statue of him, at Whitehall or Soho Square or whatever is the proper center of things British.

WE want an American Kipling. Perhaps some day the son of some United States official in the Philippines will develop the literary gift on a little Manila newspaper and write vivid tales of the ways of our little brown brothers and the bigger white folk who try to be brotherly with him. Then we hope that he will visit the United States for the first time at the age say of twenty-four, when he has maturity and background of a sort, and eyes to see and youthful enthusiasms to be stirred, when twenty-four hours is all too short a day and when the sense of wonder and admiration is still blazing and glowing within him. Then we want him to see the glories of the California coast, the towering peaks of the coast range, the

amethyst haze of the desert, the ramparts of the Rockies, the billowing grain fields of the great middle valley. We want him to see the great coast and lake cities where a thousand ships go daily down to sea. We want him to hear keen-faced men talk in clubs and market places in two hundred cities. We want him to catch the Old World glamour of New Orleans and the austere intelligence of New England. We want him to listen to the conversation of farmers in the dusk of a Kansas twilight and the tinkle of banjos and the soft sound of darky voices where the cotton plantations spread out from the shores of the Father of Waters. We want him to feel as we do when we listen to the New World Symphony by Dvorak. Then we want him to write for THE POPULAR.

NOW you know what we are aiming at, and can tell how closely we sometimes hit it. We want real Americans and we think they are worth describing. Kipling thought so, too, and tried to hit off the American spirit in a little sketchy poem published long ago. Here is his idea of the American in four lines:

"Enslaved, illogical, elate,
He greets th' embarrassed Gods, nor fears
To shake the iron hand of Fate,
Or match with Destiny for beers."

We think he has the idea. The only word we don't understand is "enslaved." Perhaps the poet had some premonition of prohibition and intended his American to win from Destiny, beer of the 2.75 variety.

However that may be, we think we have a real hundred per cent American such as Kipling would describe, if he knew us well enough, in the next issue of this magazine. He is the central figure in a new novel by one of the greatest of the younger American writers, Dane Coolidge. The story runs in four parts and the first big installment comes out in two weeks. It would be wise to order your number now.

THE story is called "Fate and the Fighter," and is the tale of a red-blooded, stubborn, likable man's effort to command his destiny. The man's name is Calhoun. His folks came from the South, but he is a Western mining man, short a little on education but long on all the qualities that go to make the fighter. A great story, worth talking about for a page or two. But when you start the story, you'll do the talking. We don't have to.

The complete novel which opens the next number is by Roy Norton and is called "The Glyphs." A "glyph," as you probably know, is an ancient inscription, such as the hieroglyphs made by the Egyptian priests in the pyramids. This is a straightforward tale of adventure in a lost city in Central America and one of Norton's best.

THERE is a great Western story in the next issue by Knibbs, a story about the "heathen Chinee" by Sinclair, a South Sea story by Stacpoole, a coastwise sea story by Frederick Jackson, and a lot of other things just as good.

Tennyson said, in "Locksley Hall,"

"Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay."

We often think that twenty-five years of real, outdoor America is a lot better than either. There's a big bit of it coming to you in the next POPULAR.

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Frederick J. Jackson

gives us "The Flat-footed Road," another of his tales of life on the Pacific.

And Raymond J. Brown has another Clementine," that is, under the surface,

In the POPULAR

for the Next Number

J. E. Grinstead

whose stories of Western life you have enjoyed, begins his first serial, "Genius Ready Made." Life in Oklahoma is the theme.

Charles Somerville

in "The Red Hair," contributes a tale of a mysterious crime that will surprise the jaded reader.

Dane Coolidge

makes the Southwest more interesting than he has ever made it before, in his fine serial, "Fate and the Fighter."

story of the race track, "Makin' Book for a clever satire on the whole racing game.

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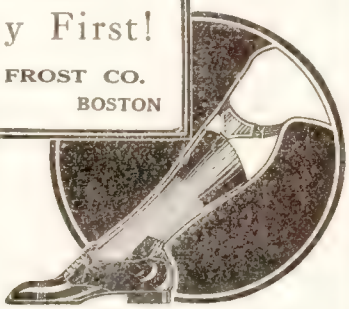

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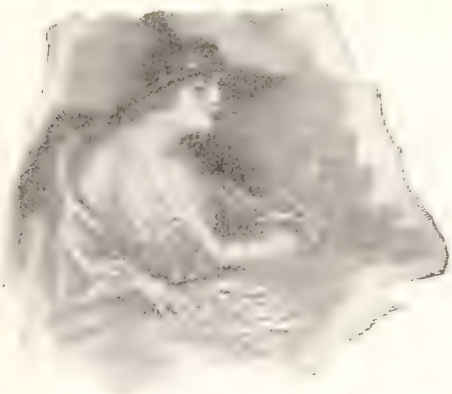

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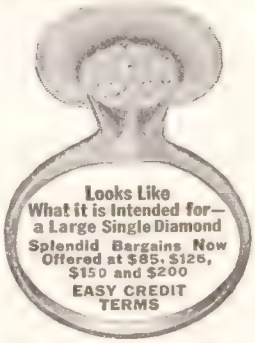

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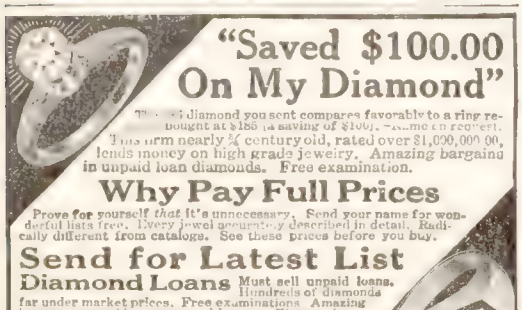

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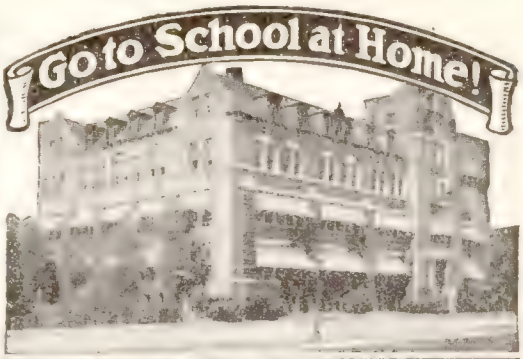

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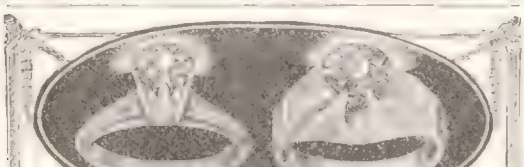

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Send Your Name and We'll Send You a Lachnite

DON'T send a penny. Send your name and finger size and say, "Send me a Lachnite mounted in a solid gold ring on 10 days' free trial." We will send it prepaid right to your home. When it comes merely deposit $4.75 with the postman and then wear the ring for 10 full days. If you, or if any of your friends can tell it from a diamond, send it back. But if you decide to buy it—send $2.50 a month until $18.75 has been paid.

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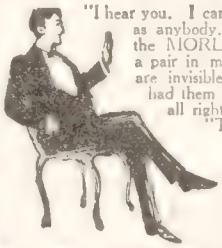

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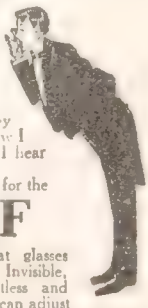

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Camels supply cigarette contentment beyond anything you ever experienced! You never tasted such full-bodied mellow-mildness; such refreshing, appetizing flavor and coolness.. The more Camels you smoke the greater becomes your delight—*Camels are such a cigarette revelation!*

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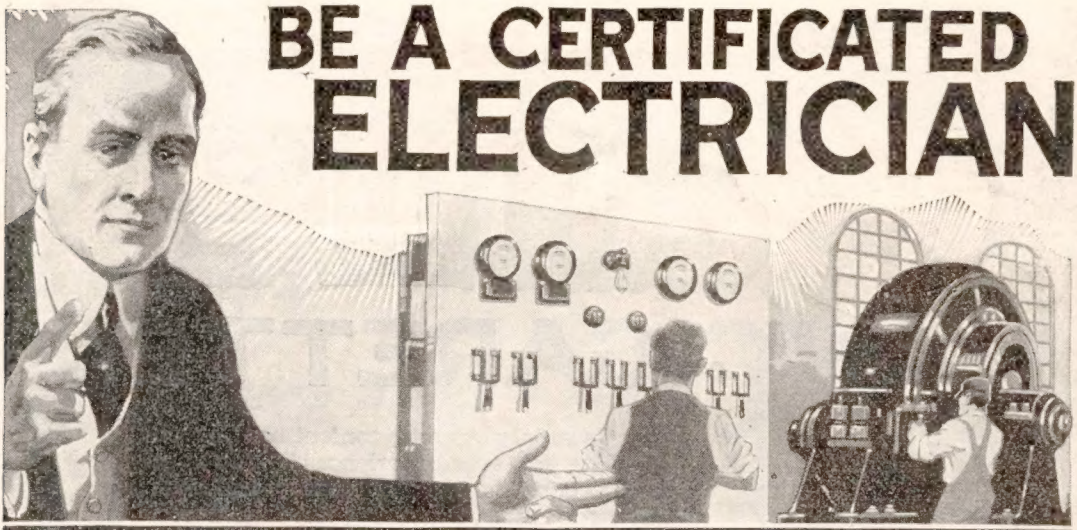

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SIR: Send at once—fully prepaid and entirely free—complete particulars of your great offer for this month.

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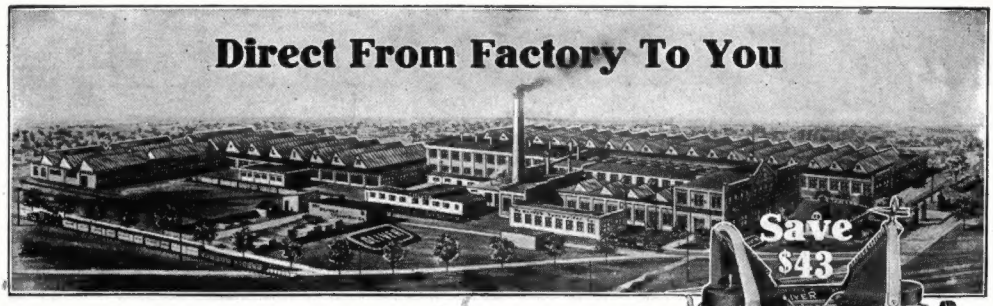

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Prices Smashed Amazingly!

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We ship direct from our big factory, devoted exclusively to the manufacture and direct distribution of this wonderful Oliver. Don't send one penny. Merely send us the coupon for a new latest model Oliver Nine. Try it for five days. If you decide to keep it pay us $57 at the rate of $3 per month. If you don't want it, send it back, express collect. We even refund the outgoing transportation charges. You cannot lose a cent.

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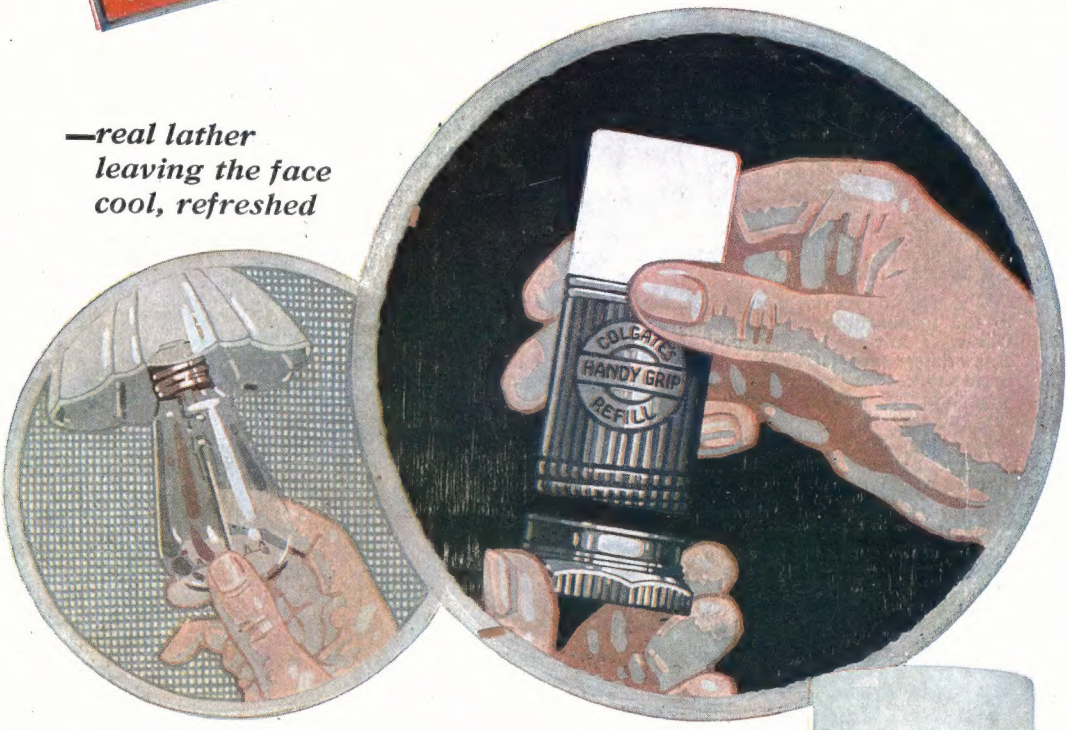
"HANDY GRIP" PATENTED 1917

The Refill Shaving Stick

—real lather leaving the face cool, refreshed



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Simply mount the stub on a big white "Refill" stick—threaded to screw in where the original stick was—just as easy as putting a new bulb in an electric-light socket.

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Mount the old stub on the new Refill

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